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THE LIFE OF THE WHITE DEVIL

In the early years of the seventeenth century there was produced on the London stage a rambling, fascinating, deeply-moving tragedy, which, next to Shakespeare's, takes a place amongst the greatest plays in our language: *The White Devil*, by John Webster.

Like all playwrights of this period, Webster borrowed his plot; and in this case he borrowed it from life. He told in his own way the story of Vittoria Accorambona, the White Devil, the most beautiful woman in Italy, who was slaughtered in her own bedroom as she knelt in prayer.

Vittoria was still in her twenties when she died in 1585. Yet into a few years she packed enough adventure and abrupt changes of fortune to surfeit a life four times as long. While still in her teens she saw her first husband go from her bed to his carefully planned assassination. She rocketed to notoriety and fortune as the ill-starred love of a wealthy duke. She offended the mighty Medici. The Holy Father himself was involved in her affairs. Whatever she did, wherever she went, she was surrounded by glamour, jealousy, love, hatred and blood.

Mr. Bax has told her story brilliantly and with careful scholarship. The incredible events which he narrates form a microcosm of Renaissance Italy—every fault and every virtue of that fantastic age is represented.

A truly fascinating study.

THE LIFE OF THE WHITE DEVIL



VITTORIA ACCORAMBONI

From the painting by Alessandro Allori (nephew of Il Bronzino), now in the possession of Count Marcantonio Caracciolo del Leone, by whose permission it is reproduced

THE LIFE OF THE WHITE DEVIL

By

CLIFFORD BAX

WITH 9 HALF-TONE ILLUSTRATIONS



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and Sydney

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To

MRS. HUGH MILLER

(OLGA KATZIN)

A staunch friend of

long standing

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CHAPTER I

Aesthetic Gangsters

THE men and women who figure most prominently in the Italian Renaissance, that extraordinary onrush in the soul of mankind, behaved so violently that to persons who could never be tossed about by emotion they must seem strangely remote, unreal and exaggerated. Everyone who, in imagination, has walked into that period is aware, for instance, that a Florentine potentate might have a passion for beauty and, at the same time, a complete disregard for the quenching of human life. It cannot be said too often that, according to the best authority,[1] Lucrezia Borgia never used poison; but there can be little or no doubt that Cesare Borgia, Francesco de' Medici, and many other important men of the Renaissance, carefully investigated the poisons known at their time, and that arsenic was their favourite. We may doubt whether anybody really poisoned an image of the Virgin, intending that his enemy should kiss it; and whether there is truth in the legend of poisoned gloves or of venom-filled rings which, being equipped inside with a tiny

[1] Gregorovius.

pin, scratched and so killed the wearer: but a man named Squire undoubtedly poisoned a saddle which Queen Elizabeth was about to use, and the more we study the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the less are we likely to say that such villainies were never really practised. We must also bear in mind that many of these people had a much deeper delight in beauty than is characteristic of the twentieth century. The poor—peasants or artisans or small shopkeepers—may possibly not have cared for fine painting or proud architecture: we cannot tell, for they have left no record: but we may well doubt whether the poor Sienese did not love their Lily Tower, whether the poor Florentines were indifferent to the manifold works of beauty in their city. And we must remember that road-workmen of that period are said, by Merejkowski, to have cried out with pleasure when they unearthed, by accident, a Greek statue. Nobody will deny that the princes and the aristocracy of the time loved beautiful works of art as spontaneously as people of our own age love cars and aeroplanes. Had it not been so, we should not prize Italy as we do. In that old marvellous country we drink so deeply of Europe's past as to be able to appreciate the impermanence of the present and all its anxieties. Athens may indeed have been the "eye of Greece" and "mother of arts", but the splendid impulse from Athens might have died away altogether (as the

Dark Ages show) if Italy had not, all of a sudden, recaptured that tremendous inspiration.

The Renaissance, then, was thronged with beauty-loving and melodramatic souls. We ought to be impatient, therefore, whenever a theatre critic dismisses a play as "mere cloak and rapier drama". Such drama was, in sixteenth-century Italy, the kind of life which everybody had to expect, and the present story will make this abundantly clear. Real life was melodramatic; and people were so emotional that anything might happen at any moment. We must get this into our heads if we wish to comprehend the ensuing history. Nobody lived the safe, comfortable and well-ordered life of Enfield or Purley. The rich or eminent man might be poisoned, or be stabbed in the back, any day, any night; and the poor man had to live very obsequiously if he was to avoid being slain, out of hand, by an irritated nobleman. As for the women, they had either to marry or to go into nunneries; and they could marry only if they were extremely desirable or if their fathers had plenty of cash. And when a woman had married, she was as much a possession of her husband as his greyhounds were, or his falcons. Moreover, if she was discovered, or even gravely suspected, of adultery, there would soon be a cord round her throat. It was emphatically a male period. If, for example, a wife was taken in adultery, sometimes her brothers, not her husband,

would perform the murder. The brothers felt for the husband. They recognized that the girl had stained their family honour.

Now, we were told long ago that "to indict a whole nation" is to talk absurdly; but if we make no generalizations we also make no progress; and so let us consider whether we can understand the history of the Italian Renaissance if we say boldly that most Italians are born actors. Let us add the cognate reflection that most Irishmen are born actors: and then let us think of the United States in the nineteen-twenties. In a word, let us remember the American gangsters, thrown to the surface by Prohibition. Judging by their names, the most notorious gangsters must have come of either Italian or Irish stock: and it is notable that the best known of the whole group is said to have had his rivals murdered and then to have played Bach on an organ which he had installed in his Chicago apartment. He loved good music, and he did not quail at murder. We see, in Al Capone, a soul which, due to be born in the Renaissance, was—somehow or other—delayed, and born in our own time. The main point, however, is that there are souls, of which Irish and Italian examples are typical, who cannot distinguish between acting and real life. They act well (and who will deny the dramatic ability of either race?) because they live the part which they are acting: but, unfortunately, they continue to

treat real life as though it were a play. That is why the Irishman, having burnt some landowner's house, can sincerely hope that his victim's cold is better: and why a Renaissance Italian could almost persuade himself, as we shall see, that he had not married the wife of a man whom he had murdered. The dramatic races live what they act, and act what they live. Their eyes do not focus well; and if we fail to understand this temperament of the actor, we shall never understand why the people in the following story behaved as they did. A dead man was to them exactly like a stage-corpse. They never stopped to think that he would not get up in "the wings": and it is only by keeping in mind this idea that we can reconcile the ferocity with the friendliness of the Irish, or comprehend how an Italian duke of the sixteenth century could fondle his wife and then strangle her. That, we shall find, is what the Duke of Bracciano did.

Every man is a dramatist, and a fine actor, in his dreams: but it is necessary that we should not continue in a state of dream when we are out of bed and have brushed our teeth. The men and women of the Italian Renaissance got out of bed, but they never waked up and never realized that every human life must be descended from the first appearance of "life", that mysterious force, in those famous "three dimensions". They acted their lives; and that is what we are about to realize.

CHAPTER II

The *Sixteenth*-Century "*Scene*"

VITTORIA ACCORAMBONI, whom John Webster has immortalized as "The White Devil," is the central figure in this tragical story. We should be poor-minded if we thought of her as someone who has been dead for so long that we can take no interest in her strange adventures. In most parts of England there are still houses in which, had destiny caused her to be born in this country, she might have lived. Compton-Wynyates and Penshurst Palace are places which were far above the social level to which she was born; for although she came of long and aristocratic lineage, Vittoria's parents represented a decayed nobility: but she might well have lived her earlier years in one of the many Elizabethan manor-houses which we find all over England. Moreover, at the time of her death Shakespeare had still some years to live, perhaps unwillingly; Queen Elizabeth was fifty; Ronsard, Tasso and Tintoretto were hard at work; and there were many living persons who had seen Michelangelo, Ariosto and even Raffaello. In fact, when Webster wrote his play about her—based, as we shall see, upon a most inac-

curate account of what had happened—it was as though a contemporary playwright were to compose a play about Mrs Thompson or Mrs Rattenbury.

In order to move easily among the vivid ghosts of sixteenth-century Italy we need to understand something of their social conditions and of their political background. If, however, we first consider the kind of society in which she found herself alive, we realize at once that sanitation, medicine and surgery were still extremely primitive. (Is it not held by some scholars that Shakespeare's death was due to the bad drainage-system of Stratford?) Communication at any distance was laborious. If the telephone had then been invented, Vittoria might not have perished in the June of her beauty; but it was only by slowly carried letters or by the report of travellers that anyone in Florence or Naples could obtain news of events in Rome or Padua.

Rich men had coaches and luggage-wagons. Ordinary men had to travel on horseback or on foot; and any journey at this particular period was dangerous because the whole of Italy was terrorized by bandits. Life was an exciting and uncertain experience. Even in the great cities, especially at night, a man had constantly to look out for an ambush. Women were always in peril. Probably the vast multitudes of the peasantry were crude and bestial, although we must not forget that Pope Sixtus the Fifth, a dominant character

in the following pages, came of peasant-stock. The Church then, as now in Ireland, made it possible for any swineherd, if he was clever enough, to climb into eminence. There was, too, a sense of rank, an acceptance of privilege, which, even in a snobbish country, we of the twentieth century cannot wholly imagine. Nobody seems ever to have resented the unearned increment of the dukes and princes; and if there was an Italian Wat Tyler, he is not easy to discover. It is likely, indeed, that the poor took a pride in the splendour of their masters and of their cities. The aristocracy was passionate, cunning and intensely appreciative of all things beautiful. We live in an age of engineering, Vittoria lived in an age of art. Wherever a man of that period might go, even into unimportant hill-towns, such as Saludecio or Coriano, he would find proud architecture and probably some lovely wall-frescoes in the Church. The princes and dukes, in short, were emulous of one another not only in respect of military power but also of the beauty which their rivals had assembled. One duke had to out-splendour another in his dress, his equipage and his works of art; and these potentates, perhaps in the manner of Indian Maharajahs, would compete for the help of great artists toward manifesting the glory of a small caste and the rendering of daily life more gracious. In Baldessare Castiglione's noble book, *The Courtier*, we may still find how deli-

cately sensitive in social intercourse a man or woman of the upper class was expected to be; nor was Castiglione a voice crying in the wilderness. On the contrary, he exercised a strong influence upon the great persons of his time, and in the formidable, grim and high-perched palace of Urbino we should have found that most of his precepts were fulfilled.

The age, moreover, despite its violence and its double-dealing, was an age of letters. It was also an age when the tenets of Roman Catholicism still dominated the minds and the imaginations of all Europeans, with very few exceptions. There must have been exceptions, for Leonardo da Vinci, many years earlier, had written, in his secret notebook: "This day in all parts of Europe great nations will bewail the death of one man who died in the East"—a sceptic's reference to Good Friday; and fifty years of intensive enquiry cannot have reduced the number of Italian freethinkers: but it is important for us to remember, as indeed we shall abundantly learn, that princes and peasants, alike, were overawed by the prestige of the Papacy. As for literature, every prince and every cardinal was assumed to be a man of literary taste. Most of the princes were capable of murder, most of the cardinals were subtle intriguers: but Cardinal Borromeo, in whom there was neither violence nor cunning, was a scholar who makes us understand how nobly a man of that period might conduct his life: and

for one moment he comes into the twisted story of Vittoria Accoramboni.

She was, according to those who saw her, the most beautiful girl of her time; and that, no doubt, is why someone, so many generations afterwards, is writing her "Life." Certainly she was a life-glad young woman and, almost certainly, a small-souled one. She is reputed to have been a poetess. Her best biographer, Domenico Gnoli, writing in the middle of the nineteenth century, denies that she had any skill in verse and suggests that, like most of the girls in her station, she had merely been taught to finger out a sonnet or madrigal: but there is enough evidence to make us believe that she did write verse and that it was not quite negligible. Now when, at the age of sixteen, this beautiful child arrived in Rome for the first time, she saw much that the reader himself might see to-day: the Coliseum, those fragments of the Forum, the Pillar of Trajan, the Triumphal Arches of Constantine and of Titus. For the rest, Rome at her time, but for very few more years, was cluttered over by mediaeval slums. Nevertheless, Vittoria found in Rome many buildings which we also may see, or have seen; and great architecture is one of the human works which put us into spiritual touch with those who are no longer experiencing, or enduring, the vivid dream which we call "life".

Let us turn now to the political state of Europe.

European politics do not much affect ordinary persons, except in time of war, but Vittoria, though she seemed at first to be insignificant, was to be injured even by so remote a person as the King of Spain. Philip of Spain, that devout Catholic, was then the man of whom all Europe was most afraid. England would have seemed to Spaniards and Italians very much as Sweden seems at the present time—a little northern kingdom, unlikely to have much effect upon highly cultured Italy or world-straddling Spain. France caused some anxiety to the Popes, for France was being torn asunder by the quarrel of Catholicism with the vigorous heresy of the Protestants.

We must keep in mind, too, that the country which we call Italy was at this time an assemblage of city-states, and that all of them were overshadowed by the military power and the religious prestige of the Papacy —that is to say, of Rome. Seeing that Europe for the most part still believed that the Pope was God's earthly representative, any man who achieved the chair of Saint Peter exercised an incalculable psychic influence. Even Henry the Eighth of England must have quailed a little before deciding to incur excommunication; and the dominance of the Pope over the minds of Renaissance people will be demonstrated again and again as we examine the life of Vittoria. It is necessary to know, moreover, that the Pope was a secular prince who pos-

sessed a formidable army and who ruled Rome and the Papal States by means of a police-force which was alternately feeble or drastic. The most important person in the affairs of Italy, after the Pope, was the King of Spain, because he was also the lord of Naples and of Sicily. This meant, of course, that at any moment the full military might of Spain could march into the country and make short work of the Italian princes, dukes and republics. The third power in the scale of importance was, perhaps, the so-called Republic of Venice. It was really an oligarchy, for the city, more beautiful than any other city which men have ever built, was managed by the Doge and his Council of Ten: and we shall find that the Venetian Republic emerges from this story with more honour than any of the players in it or than any other State. After the Venetians we ought to name the Medici family, who were still in control of Florence. Their device—three golden balls—may now be familiar to us as the sign of a pawnbroker, but they had come into prominence because they invented the happy notion of banking; and if anyone perceives a similarity between banking and pawnbroking, we should have some difficulty in altering his ideas. The Medici lent money to half Europe; and they ruled, with careful regard to the shibboleths of democracy, a talented and pugnacious people.

For the rest, the country was governed by princes

and dukes who were formidable in varying degrees; and most of them were drawn into the web of Vittoria's destiny. At Ferrara, in their rose-red lake-surrounded castle, the ancient family of Este did much to encourage the culture of their time. The Gonzagas were at Mantua, the Sforzas at Milan, the Baglioni at high-bastioned Perugia, and at all times these and the other lords of Italy had to reckon with the Dukes of Urbino, in their grim and lofty citadel—a family which may well have been the most civilized persons of the sixteenth century.

There was, too, the ancient, powerful and many-branched clan of the Orsini. It is with the Orsini clan that we shall be principally concerned. The head of the House at this time was Paolo Giordano, Duke of Bracciano: at home an "equivalent of kings", but, as we shall see, a rajah who dared not offend the Medici, the King of Spain or the Pope.

And it was he, the Duke of Bracciano, who ruined his career by falling completely under the enchantment of Vittoria Accoramboni.

CHAPTER III

The Wonderful Peasant Boy

THE melodious names of Italian towns and people will stray frequently across these pages, like exotic flowers in a botanical garden, and it is imperative to memorize them. First of all, we must know that early in the sixteenth century a man, his wife and their three small children were living precariously in the village of Montalto. The man's name was Peretto, his wife's name was Marianna di Camerino. Poor as they were, Peretto managed somehow or other to rent a small farm in the neighbouring village of Grottammare. His wife went into service at the house of their landlord.

During the autumn of 1520 she was big with her fourth child, and it was at about the same season that both she and her husband dreamed that their unborn child would some day sit upon the throne of Saint Peter. The boy was born on December the 13th, and his safe arrival brought them so much happiness that his parents named him Felice. Moreover, they had complete faith in their extraordinary dream and sometimes invited their peasant friends to kiss the feet of a future Pope. His sister Camilla, too,—a prominent

figure in this story,—believed so surely in the exalted fate of her baby brother that whenever she had to ask a favour from the neighbours she intimated that some day Felice would amply recompense them. Strange stories crystallize readily round the infancy of a great man, and it is not surprising, therefore, to learn that one day Felice's cot burst into flames and that, when his mother rushed to the rescue, she found the baby unharmed and smiling; or that he had a wonderful escape from drowning; or that when the other children succumbed to a dangerous epidemic Felice remained immune.

When he was old enough, he helped his father with the farm-work, gathering endives, collecting wood and breaking the stubborn soil—humble work which he recollected with pleasure in the time of his glory. There is, however, no evidence that he was ever a swineherd. That was an exaggeration disseminated subsequently by his enemies.

At the Franciscan monastery in Montalto, the village from which the family had come, there lived an old friar named Brother Salvatore. He was an uncle of Peretto, the struggling farmer; and so greatly was he impressed by the precocity of Felice that he took the child into the monastery, set him to wait at table and, in due time, taught him Latin. In this way Felice had already started out upon his destined road. At the age

of fourteen he took his vows, a ceremony which usually meant that the novice chose a new name, but, rather surprisingly, Peretto persuaded the friars to let the lad keep his baptismal name.

After this, he studied theology at Fermo, Ferrara, Bologna, Rimini and Siena, not, it seems, without admiring the architecture of his age. At Fermo, when he was almost eighteen, he obtained his doctorate. At twenty-one he was known to the Sienese as the leading theologian at the local Franciscan monastery, and in Siena he made some study of medicine. Eight years later,[1] at Assisi, he met Cardinal Carpi, who advised him to go to Rome. Brother Felice walked all the way.

By this time he was well known as a preacher "of great ardour and eloquence". Indeed, he is said to have preached in most of the Italian cities, even so far south as Naples. His body, his emotions and his will were equally strong. In appearance he was "far from handsome". His emotional make-up is difficult to comprehend. On the one hand, all records agree that he was extremely irascible, flying into a rage at the slightest provocation. On the other hand, he could repress an emotion for years without letting it cool. Again, as Pastor observes, he was at once "extra-

[1] Ludwig von Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vol. xx: but Colonna states that Felice first visited Rome in 1552.

ordinarily severe" but "nevertheless easily moved to tears"; parsimonious and yet "charitable and often very generous". In the years of his power the Venetian ambassador reported that he "has to be handled as carefully as a piece of glass". To the end of his life he remained frugal and a disciplinarian both to others and to himself. It is interesting to learn, for instance, that he cared so little for possessions that he gave away "his paternal inheritance" (which cannot have been large) "to his nephews but kept his books by special permission": and that his mind was so orderly that he catalogued his library, and even kept a record of the sermons he had preached during his many wanderings. The reader is likely, when he has read this book, to consider that Brother Felice was, on balance, an admirable character, not greatly, if at all, ambitious in his own behalf, but resolute to strengthen the Church and to rid Society of its vices. The time was out of joint—how seriously, we shall soon apprehend; but this grim Franciscan was not appalled by the tremendous task of putting it right.

At Rome he made several important friends. One of these was Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus and, therefore, the spearhead of the movement, which meant so much to Brother Felice, for counteracting the Reformation. Another new friend was Cardinal Carafa, of more personal value to the eloquent

preacher, seeing that in 1555 he became Pope Paul the Fourth. The new Pope at once took advantage of the friar's genius, first appointing him to carry out certain technical tasks within the Church and then, a year later, promoting him to be inquisitor, or spiritual overseer, of the whole Venetian Republic.

The farmer's son was now moving within a brilliant and powerful group. He went to Spain in the entourage of the Papal Legate—Boncompagni—who was destined to become Pope Gregory the Thirteenth. In fact, he was rising rapidly, and rising because of his talents and his uncompromising sincerity. Pius the Fifth gave him first a bishopric and then, when Felice was not quite fifty, the red hat of a Cardinal. Together with the power and the dignity of a Cardinal, he received from Pius the sum of one thousand and two hundred scudi which it was customary to allot to any Cardinal who was a poor man. We shall need, therefore, to recognize him for many pages to come as Cardinal Montalto: for the new Cardinal, with that sentiment for his origin which is characteristic of the peasant, had taken as his title the name of the village in which his parents had lived for so long.

The reign of a Pope was nearly always brief because a Cardinal had to be old, or at least elderly, before he could possibly be elected to a post which, at that time, was the most conspicuous in the world; and within a

few years both Paul the Fourth and Pius the Fifth had passed into that other world where, we may presume, the soul, stripped of all earthly prestige, must rely upon its own strength and beauty. This meant that Cardinal Boncompagni ascended the Papal throne as Gregory the Thirteenth.

It was an event which checked the career of Felice Peretto. Gregory had never much liked him, and that is not surprising when we compare the personalities of the two men. The Cardinal, as we have seen, was a man of rigid opinions, an extremely determined man. The Pope, we are told, was a man who could never say "Yes". From this it is obvious that he was always afraid to commit himself, a timid personality, the very antithesis of Cardinal Montalto. The Cardinal must have thought of the Pope as a feeble creature, wasting a unique opportunity of reforming the Church and the world. The Pope must have thought of Cardinal Montalto as an irritating busybody, always eager to make everybody uncomfortable: and it is worth noting that Montaigne says of Gregory: "his language is Italian, smacking of its Bolognese twitter which is the worst dialect in Italy, and, moreover, his speech is halting by nature."

Montalto, however, though he never got on well with Pope Gregory, must, at this critical stage in his destiny, have used all his reserves of self-control in order

to cover up his innate impetuosity and his passion for reforming the world. More and more was he regarded by his fellow-Cardinals as a mild man, growing old, not at all a man to be feared: but Cardinal Montalto was biding his time and merely pretending, with complete success, to be an extinct Vesuvius.

And just at this moment of his life we sail into the wide waters of romance and tragedy. The essential story—the story that captured the imagination of John Webster—now begins.

CHAPTER IV
Vittoria's Fatal Marriage

BY the time that Cardinal Montalto was a gaunt man of fifty it is probable that his sister, Camilla, was already keeping house for him. His religion was genuine and he was not, therefore, a Cardinal who would keep mistresses on the sly. We know, too, that he was a man of strong family feeling and that he gave money freely to almost anyone who could claim to be a relative. A brother, named Prospero, had died in 1560, but we may reasonably hope that Montalto's rustical parents lived long enough to see their vivid dream more than half-way toward fulfilment.

Years earlier, his sister Camilla had married a certain Gianbattista (John the Baptist) Mignucci. She had borne him two children, a son and a daughter. The daughter does not much concern us—would not concern us at all, in fact, were it not that only through her did the Montalto stock survive until 1655. The son, on the other hand, was the most luckless, though not the most tragic, of the persons in this tale.

His name was Francesco Peretti. Possibly at the Cardinal's behest, he very soon dropped his father's name (Mignucci), and he then improved upon that of his grandfather. All the literate world remembers this young man as the very embodiment of misfortune, and yet, try as we may, we cannot discover what he was really like. From this we can hazard without unfairness that in all probability he was a commonplace lad, just one of a million; the product of his period, not a personality who might have changed it. Indeed, it is unlikely that we should ever have heard of Francesco Peretti had not his uncle, the Cardinal Montalto, been so successful that even Peretti acquired a modest position in Roman society. The Cardinal, moreover,—profoundly attached to his sister Camilla,—had considerable affection to spare for her children. Now, young Peretti was destined to attract, and ultimately to marry, Vittoria Accoramboni. Let us watch, therefore, the devious ways in which destiny, or karma, brought this boy and girl together.

Vittoria was the tenth of eleven children. Her father's name was Claudio Accoramboni and, not without cause but also not without fantasy, he prided himself upon the antiquity of his stock. He claimed descent—justly, perhaps—from a certain Anastasio who had come from Germany into Italy in 716. More quaintly he sometimes referred to an ancestor, said to be named Pom-

ponius Corimbus, who had lived, if at all, before the birth of Christ. Claudio's father was Girolamo Accoramboni, who, if we may believe his epitaph, was a doctor (probably of medicine) and something of a philosopher. He lived and died in the lovely wild little city of Gubbio, and it was there that the Accoramboni family, as minor noblefolk, might most happily have used their lives. For the rest, we find that the family, despite its old lineage, was not rich, and that Claudio, who would like to have been a soldier, was, in fact, a lawyer. He studied in Bologna, but with mediocre assiduity.

His wife was a formidably fecund woman: and if there is any truth in the old saw that "it takes a man to make a girl", we might assume, from the progeny of Tarquinia Paluzzi Albertoni, that the converse is true. There seems to be little doubt that Tarquinia had more character than Claudio: and of her eleven children, eight were boys. The eldest child, Mario, became an abbot and one of Cardinal d'Este's secretaries. The second, Ottavio, achieved the bishopric of Fossombrone and the archbishopric of Urbino, dying as a very aged man in 1635; and for our purpose it is notable that he seems to have been advanced in the Church by Cardinal Montalto. The third child became secretary to Cardinal Sforza. Marcello, the fourth, is one of the blackest scoundrels in history. The fifth and sixth sons

are negligible now: the seventh, Flaminio, was musical, no soldier and the best-loved by his famous sister. So little was Tarquinia's vitality exhausted that she then produced the eighth and ninth of her little blessings—two daughters who spent their lives in nunneries, the one at Gubbio, the other at Rome. Claudio's finances did not correspond with his philoprogenitivity, and, since he was unable to provide these girls with dowries, they were doomed to celibacy from birth. A similar fate might have befallen Tarquinia's tenth child, Vittoria, had the girl not developed, somehow or other, a beauty that made ripples even in England. Moreover, she inherited much of her mother's vitality. The eleventh child, a boy, died in infancy, nor can we be surprised.

Seemingly at Montalto's suggestion (he showed interest in the elder boys because of their religious bias), Claudio and Tarquinia decided to move from Gubbio to Rome. They would not have thought much of Cardinal Montalto. True, he had attained a coat of arms—a lion rampant supported by small pears, an heraldic pun upon "Peretti"; but so modern a coat could hardly have impressed the Accoramboni. They never forgot that their own was ancient: a white griffin rampant on a field rouge with swords and mounds in its claws, crossed by four bars azure; and completed by a hart overtopped by a star, the arms

of the Ubaldini, added by the redoubtable Tarquinia. Nevertheless, a Cardinal might be useful, especially at Rome, and no doubt Vittoria's father hoped for an increase of clients.

No sooner had the Cardinal's nephew, Francesco Peretti, encountered Vittoria than the two young people fell in love. Vittoria, who was born on February the 15th, 1557, would then have been sixteen. Peretti was two or three years older. At first neither family was at all pleased by the prospect of a marriage. The money-watchful Cardinal certainly hoped that the son of his dear sister would marry into a wealthier family; and, although Vittoria was conventionally devout, both Montalto and his sister feared that the girl's vivacity might degenerate into flightiness. As for Claudio and Tarquinia, they had to recognize that Peretti's uncle was a renowned preacher and at least a Cardinal, but they could not get away from the fact that Montalto was, for a Cardinal, a poor man and, far worse, that he came of inglorious peasant-stock. Still, the Accoramboni, though they had seemed important in Gubbio, were undoubtedly nonentities in Rome; and what with eight boys and two other girls to look after, perhaps it would be just as well to marry Vittoria while they could.

These mild misgivings did not deter the lovers: and for us who know whither fate was leading them, there

is pathos in an entry, under 1573, which may be read in the parish records of Santa Maria della Corte. It runs:

"On the 28th of June a marriage was contracted . . . between Signor Francesco Peretti, nephew of the Cardinal Montalto, of no diocese, on the one part, with Madonna Vittoria Coramboni" [*sic*].

The reception and the wedding feast were held in the house of Vittoria's parents; and it is easy to visualize the splendour of costume which filled the house on that occasion, to hear the hubbub of the guests, to share in the excitement of Francesco and Vittoria, and to picture the beggars of Rome who awaited the forthcoming of the bridal pair. Eventually, when all the long-expected events of that red-letter day were over at last, the lovers drove to their new home, a house in the Via dei Leutari. Even Italian writers do not term it a "palazzo".

They had every cause for being the happiest persons in that huge city—excepting that they were distinctly short of money. Everybody assumed, however, that the bridegroom's uncle would look after them handsomely. Indeed, the Accoramboni parents, when they took up their candles and went to bed that night, must have thought that to supply the children with money was the least that Cardinal Montalto could do: and he had made, as they would admit,

a most satisfactory beginning with an assurance that he would give the young people a coach. Here was a promise which overbrimmed Vittoria's cup of joy. Nobody of any importance in Rome could exist without a coach; and she certainly wanted to seem important.

Francesco, if he was a normal young man, could not help being proud of his wife's beauty, pleased by its effect upon their social position, and a little annoyed to find that she so greatly outshone him. If, as Gnoli believed, she was more than somewhat vain, we cannot be surprised. Roman society regarded her as a miracle of human propagation. A poet, writing after her death, acclaimed her as "Before all other beautiful women, the most beautiful": and if the existing portraits do not explain their enthusiasm, we have to remember that they were not painted by men of great skill and that the standard of beauty in women is for ever changing. Even in her early married days there was a Latin-writing poet, Girolamo Catena, esteemed at the time, who makes her say, in a set of verses, "I am that great Vittoria who takes from the Greeks and from the Latins the prize for beauty." In a longer poem he wrote:

After the violence of fate had overcome Rome,
And an enemy had overwhelmed her desolate arenas,
After the barbarian shattered the citadels of Ausonia,

And Rome the conqueror fell and for an age lay conquered,
Vittoria arose, born under a happy star,
She upon whom all the gods and goddesses vie in showering favours.
Whatsoever things this Vittoria scans with her glance
She has bound to herself, and has restored the glory of the sons of Romulus.
When she but looks upon Rome, wonderful to tell,
Rome is conquered, admits the conquest and shines more brightly than she did of old time.[1]

As for the kind of society in which these two young folks were living, we are fortunate enough to have an account of it from no less a person than Montaigne. He visited Rome in 1581, and he says of it:

"One sees nothing but nobles and courtiers, and everywhere there are palaces and gardens. There is no street given over to commerce which can be compared even with those in our smaller cities, no Rue de la Harpe or Rue de St Denis. I felt that I was always in

[1] Oppressit postquam fati violentia Romam,
Obtruit hostilis vasta theatra manus,
Ausoniae postquam confregit barbarus arces,
Et victrix cecidit victaque Roma diu est,
Sidere surrexit Victoria nata secundo,
Cui certatim omnes diique deaeque favent.
Haec quaecumque sus lustrat Victoria vulta
Vincit, Romulidum restituitque decus.
Quam solum aspiciens, mirum, se victa fatetur
Vincere, quamque olim Roma nitere magis.

Quoted by Domenico Gnoli. In the penultimate line he prints "solam", but the scholar who kindly translated the verses considers that "solum" is more likely to be the word which the poet intended to use.

the Rue de Seine or on the Quai des Augustins. The appearance of the streets is the same on Sundays as on week-days. During Lent, when every day there is a 'station' in some church, one sees nothing but coaches, prelates and ladies. One thing that makes Rome stand out is that it is the most cosmopolitan city in the world. National characteristics count for little or nothing; the society taken altogether is a mixture of strangers of every kind, and everyone is at home there. The sovereign of Rome embraces all Christendom and makes laws for all. At his court it matters nothing whence men come. At Venice the independence of the government and commercial interests attract many foreigners, but there they are in the house of a stranger, whereas here they are in their own, for they depend upon their office and their dignity. Venice has a coming and going of foreigners which is as great or greater, but they reside there much less. The Roman people do not stare when they see French or Spanish or Teuton dress, and some of the beggars ask for alms in our own language."

Again, the old essayist, as might be expected by any of his admirers, visited some of the more expensive Roman courtesans, and reports that they "made men pay for their conversation as well as for their favours". "Some of them", he tells us, "are of very great beauty, but", he adds, "the beauty of the

other Roman women is not so great as it is supposed to be." Perhaps Montaigne, like a humbler visitor in Italy, did not realize that beautiful Italian wives are not (and, presumably, were not) allowed to air their beauty.

CHAPTER V
Vittoria's Lover

THE Orsini pedigree resembles the vast vine at Hampton Court, and of this ancient tree there were four main branches. The family was founded by a certain Orso from whose name the heralds inevitably chose a bear as the family emblem. Orso may have emerged from obscurity because he was related to Pope Celestine the Third: and seeing that this Pope flourished, so far as his health permitted, in the twelfth century, we can understand why all members of the Orsini clan were fanatically vain of their long lineage.

In Vittoria's time the head of the clan was, as we have said, Paolo Giordano, Duke of Bracciano. He was twenty years older than Vittoria, having been born in 1537; and in early life, unless a portrait in the Uffizi Gallery flattered him out of recognition, he was tall, handsome and of superb bearing. Bracciano itself is a steep town built on the shore of a large lake, and its houses rise up toward the church. The Duke's castle was a massive stronghold, impossible, one would surmise, to capture.

He had been born with a golden spoon in his mouth. His estates were immense, and he was accustomed to

entertain a huge retinue of secretaries, relatives, brigands, servants and hangers-on. In 1553, at the age of sixteen, Paolo Giordano made a brilliant marriage. In fact, he married Isabella de' Medici, sister of the Grand Duke of Tuscany who is better known, perhaps, as Francesco de' Medici. It is easy to realize the interest which "high society" must have taken in a marriage that united the Orsini with the Medici; and it may have been at this time or soon afterwards that Paolo was formally made a Grandee of Spain.

Isabella seems to have been an attractive and intelligent woman. Somewhat surprisingly, she bore no children during the first fifteen years of her marriage. In 1568, however, she had a daughter whom she named Leonora. In 1572 she had a son whom she named Virginio, and he it is who, in an unexpected manner, brings all the complex events of our story to a close.

In his thirties the Duke of Bracciano had achieved some reputation as a soldier. Indeed, he was, according to Addington Symonds, "a man of marked personal daring". At least he had taken part in one of the most famous battles in the history of Europe. In 1571 the Turks became so menacing that Christian potentates, with the King of Spain as their titular leader, organized what has been called "the last crusade". Philip of Spain, enriched by the gold and silver of the Mexican and Peruvian mines, had also a mightier army than



PAOLO GIORDANO ORSINI, DUKE OF BRACCIANO

From the painting in the Uffizi Gallery, Florence



E.N.A.

THE CASTLE AND TOWN OF BRACCIANO

any of his rivals: and yet, although the Christians assembled a fleet of more than two hundred ships at Messina, Philip contributed only twenty-four vessels and only eight thousand soldiers. However, on account of his prestige, the command of the fleet was given to his natural brother, Don John of Austria. Don John may have been surprised to discover that the largest contributions to his army and navy were sent by Genoa, by Venice and by Pope Pius the Fifth. And when we look back upon this fight between the Cross and the Crescent, we cannot fail to kindle when we learn that Cervantes was a member of Philip's army and that our own Sir Richard Grenville is reported to have sailed with an English contingent. Paolo Giordano had attached himself to the Pope's force, and at the head of this force there was a soldier of pre-eminent fame—Marcantonio Colonna. Seeing that this General had married one of Paolo's sisters, we may suppose that Paolo himself occupied a position of some importance. When "Don John of Austria was hidden in the smoke", Paolo saw and heard the

> pounding from the slaughter-tinted poop,
> Purpling all the ocean like a bloody pirate's sloop,
> Scarlet running over on the silvers and the golds,
> Breaking of the hatches up and bursting of the holds,
> Thronging of the thousands up that labour under sea,
> White for bliss, and blind for sun, and stunned with liberty,[1]

[1] G. K. Chesterton.

for this was the Battle of Lepanto in which innumerable Christians, captured on the coasts of the Mediterranean and working as galley-slaves, were suddenly released.

By the time that Vittoria was marrying Peretti all this had become old history, and Paolo was much more concerned with his enormous debts than with the bygone peril from Turkey. Magnificent and extravagant, he could never keep within his income, huge though it was: and time after time his brother-in-law, Francesco de' Medici, had enabled him to balance his budget. This, no doubt, was due rather to an interest in Isabella, Duchess of Bracciano, than to any sympathy with the spendthrift Duke: but there were times when Francesco either would not or could not present his brother-in-law with fifty thousand pounds, and it was Paolo's practice at such times to set out, splendidly accompanied, upon semi-royal progresses or, as we might say, mercenary pilgrimages. During these absences of her lord and master, Isabella, not unnaturally, did her best to find amusement in the castle by attending masques and dances. Unfortunately, she did not stop at these; and yet the red light should have been vivid enough. For instance, there was a scapegrace brother of Francesco de' Medici whose name was Piero; and Piero, finding that his own wife, Eleanora di Toledo, had been unfaithful, stabbed and slew her. He himself is reported to have experimented in sodomy, but, in accordance

with the masculine spirit of the age, all the best people in Italy agreed at once that Piero could never again have appeared in public if he had not murdered his wife.

The young man who, in spite of the formidable risk, induced Isabella to commit adultery was a certain Troilo (Troilus) Orsini. He had been a popular visitor to the Florentine court; and he must have had some brains, because the Medici often employed him as an ambassador, particularly upon embassies of congratulation. We must remember, too, that as an Orsini he would easily become a guest of Paolo, the head of his clan. Isabella was, it is true, no longer an irresponsible girl, but, if we want to excuse her fall from virtue, we can at least consider that Paolo, by this time, had become excessively fat. A few months earlier, in a letter to Cardinal Carafa, he had requested his Eminence to find a strong bay horse "because of the weight of my body, for which not every horse is adequate".

There is no doubt, it seems, that another member of the Orsini clan (one who was destined to compass Vittoria's death) must have been the person who brought the black news to Paolo. This man was the haughty and fearless Lodovico degli Orsini. He got hold of two amorous letters, written by his kinsman, Troilo: and the fat was in the fire.

On the evening of July the 15th, 1577, Paolo and Isabella dined pleasantly at their villa in Cerreto. In this

house the Duchess's bedroom was on the first floor: and above it, on the second floor, there was another room in which Paolo had stationed four of his bravoes. He had also ordered that a hole should be drilled in the floor, and that through this hole (which may still be seen) a cord should be dropped in such a way that it hung behind Isabella's bed. What would we not give to be able to hear the conversation or, better still, to overhear the thoughts and emotions, which passed between Paolo and Isabella at that horrible and dramatic supper. . . . For when it was over, Paolo went upstairs with Isabella to her bedroom, kissed her and, putting his arm round her, laid hand on the fatal cord, and looped it round her neck, and strangled her. She was thirty-four.

Her lover Troilo escaped to Paris; and here he lived for another four months; but one day at the end of November, 1577, while he was taking the air, a hired assassin, armed with an arquebus, shot him in the belly. Before volunteering for this congenial task, the assassin, whose name was Ambrogio Tremazzi da Modigliana, had made sure that the murder would gratify not only Paolo Giordano but his own patron, Francesco de' Medici. Francesco was, of course, livid with anger against Troilo, who had smirched the Medici honour by committing adultery with Isabella, and accordingly he had sent the assassin three hundred scudi to cover

expenses. When the work had been satisfactorily carried out, Francesco offered the assassin a bonus of six thousand ducats, but the proud Ambrogio, feeling that he had merely done his duty as a loyal servant, answered reproachfully that he wished for no reward except the honour of kissing his master's hand. Such were the charming relations between master and man in those days; and such was the solidarity of feeling between man and man in respect of a married woman's infidelity.

CHAPTER VI
Family Troubles

TROUBLE, meanwhile, had been brewing in the Accoramboni family. The two young people had not enough money to keep abreast of their rich friends. Old Claudio (Vittoria's father) had talked about supplying her with a dowry of four thousand scudi, but he always found that he could not quite raise the money. The Cardinal (Peretti's uncle) had, as we know, delighted Vittoria by promising to give her a coach; but the months went by and he did not redeem his promise. How easily we can understand her exasperation, and her husband's uncomfortable position, when they learned that the Cardinal, after a short time, was giving away large quantities of money to every conceivable object except that of their welfare. . . . He gave money to the Corporation of Montalto in order that it might set up certain buildings. In particular, he gave the Corporation 1370 scudi for the erection of a grammar-school. More wantonly still, he paid for the carving of a statue to Pope Nicholas the Fifth, and financed the decoration of a chapel in Santa Maria Maggiore at Rome. As though all this were not

sufficiently maddening, he was making money-gifts to other members of his family. There was that present of three thousand scudi to Camilla's daughter (the Cardinal's niece); a similar extravagance in behalf of the daughter of a mere cousin; and—his crowning infamy—yet another three thousand scudi which he had actually bestowed upon a baby. The baby was, it is true, Camilla's granddaughter; but any newly married couple, having married partly upon their expectations from this rich uncle, would naturally feel hurt that all this wealth—theirs by right, as it were—should, under their very eyes, be distributed to other persons.

Vittoria, somewhat spoilt by the success of her beauty, would never have reflected that old Montalto might fear lest her extravagance should ruin his nephew. Nevertheless, no man with money likes to see it tossed away by a silly woman; and yet, of course, no woman of Vittoria's type can understand that money does not grow upon trees. Again, it has been shrewdly suggested that Cardinal Montalto, in whom family feeling was so powerful, may have been disappointed that Francesco Peretti and Vittoria had not created any child.

The marital conversations in the Via dei Leutari must have become more and more undignified, less and less in the key of love. Archbishop Santorio,[1] speaking in

[1] In *Historiae Temporis Sui.*

the tones of a born curmudgeon, chastised the memory of Vittoria with scorpions. "Confident", he wrote, "in that beauty which had so greatly advanced her, she began to dream in the grand manner. She paid no attention to her husband, regarding him as a social inferior. She took to making fun of her mother-in-law (Camilla, the Cardinal's sister), slighted and quarrelled with her sister-in-law and, in general, taunted the husband and his family with the lowliness of their stock. She ridiculed the institution of marriage: and, at first secretly but afterwards with no concealment, enticed young men to pay court. Immoderately ostentatious, and enamoured of every new craze or fashion, she never went out into society without having had her hair curled and her person adorned. She walked slowly, she had flashing eyes—and a mouth ready at all times to flatter or to smile." We shall probably agree, at the end of our study, that the Archbishop used too much bitumen with his paint. He may have been one of those men who are constitutionally inimical to beauty; and, moreover, he was probably writing from hearsay, for it is difficult to believe that Vittoria mocked at marriage in the presence of anybody so austere.

Goaded by the impatient Vittoria, who did not feel that her beauty and high spirits were having a fair chance, the harassed Peretti betook himself almost daily to the Cardinal: but the old man had no intention of

pouring scudi into a sieve. And yet something had to be done. Vittoria, still coachless, was feeling desperate, and since her husband always came back empty-handed, she decided to see whether her brother Ottavio, as a fellow-churchman, could loosen Montalto's money-bags. This, to be sure, was no pleasant task for a junior ecclesiastic, but Ottavio, willing to risk anything rather than Vittoria's anger, sat down and composed a humble, almost a cringing, letter. Since he addresses Montalto as "illustrious patron" and says that he has been chosen to make this appeal because he is a member of the Accoramboni family whom the others regard as a man "devoted to the interests of your Illustrious Eminence", it is clear that Montalto approved of him and had advanced him. Moreover, the letter reveals that Montalto had already offered to make modest provision for Vittoria (including "food, clothes and servants' wages"). Ottavio says that the family desire to accept this offer, but that they are hoping that some similar provision may be afforded to Francesco Peretti. This, he adds, is the humble request of "all the undersigned, Signor Claudio, Signora Tarquinia, Mario, Marcello, Flaminio, Signor Francesco and Signora Vittoria." Which member of the family, we wonder, introduced into the middle of the letter a cunning suggestion that, if the Cardinal cannot "supply all this just now", the two young people would have to leave Rome and

spend "some years at Montalto, where they can live more economically"? Rather in sorrow than in anger, Ottavio observes that "they specially ask for the coach, as being almost indispensable, and your Illustrious Eminence may condescend to remember that he has promised it to them several times". Vittoria certainly hankered after that coach. . . .

Montalto did not wish that his nephew should go about saying that he had to disappear into the country because he and his wife could not afford to live in Rome as gentlefolk. The Cardinal was at all times unpredictable. On this occasion he did a great deal more for the young people than any of the Accoramboni family could seriously have expected. He considered recommending his nephew (Peretti) for an inconspicuous post in the Vatican. He decided to hand over to Peretti and Vittoria valuable rents: but he still said no word about that coach. It may well have been Ottavio, a blameless and religious protégé, who caused the sensible, money-careful Cardinal to relent so far.

Vittoria and also her husband, who had been asked so many times what his important uncle was really worth as a benefactor, must have changed all their feelings toward the Cardinal: and we may be sure that Tarquinia and poor dear Claudio adopted a much more favourable opinion of their august relation-by-marriage. Perhaps it was he—the long-suffering Cardinal Mon-

talto—who obtained for Flaminio, Vittoria's favourite brother, a post in the congenial household of Cardinal Farnese. Many people, let us remember, supposed that Cardinal Farnese would become the next Pope, when Gregory the Thirteenth should eventually die; and the post, therefore, brimmed with promise.

In the summer of 1580 a much graver trouble upset the Accoramboni family. Marcello, Vittoria's fourth brother, a clever, handsome and abominable fellow, killed a man named Matteo Pallavicino. This would have mattered little, no doubt, if Pallavicino had not been the brother of a Cardinal. As between Cardinals, however, the incident added to the embarrassment of Felice Montalto.

Marcello, realizing that he had been somewhat hasty, fled at once from Rome: and, by the will of destiny, he decided to go, not to the Venetian Republic (whither most refugees ran), but to the castle of Bracciano. Paolo Giordano took to him at sight: nor is that a surprise when we know the life-ruining effect of Vittoria's beauty upon the impulsive Paolo. Seeing the beauty and liveliness of Marcello, the Duke of Bracciano had, though not knowing it, come within the orbit of Vittoria's tragical attraction.

CHAPTER VII

The Murder Of Her Husband

UNFORTUNATELY for Vittoria, his sister, Marcello escaped from justice. There in the castle at Bracciano he was safer than ever Troilo had been in Paris. Troilo, after all, had committed the crime of crimes—taking sexual possession of a woman who belonged to another man. Marcello, on the contrary, had merely murdered a man in a fit of temper. There could be no comparison between the two offences. Rome, disapproving of murder, would like to have apprehended Marcello, but, once he was over the border, even the Pope could not demand his extradition.

Knowing that his fortune now depended upon Paolo Giordano, Marcello, consorting with brigands and other fellow-fugitives, quickly charmed his way into the Duke's particular favour. Paolo must already have heard rumours, when he visited his palace at Rome, of Vittoria's great beauty. Very likely the two men began to chat about her, over an evening glass of wine: and Marcello, recognizing his opportunity, assured the Duke that in all Italy there was no lovelier young woman. Paolo, glancing at his new dependant, must have seen

that a feminine version of Marcello might be beautiful indeed. Duke Paolo was a simple man. He was, in fact, almost pathetically simple; and no sooner had he listened to all this exuberant praise of Vittoria than he determined to pluck her from the glittering Christmas-tree of the world's delights.

Marcello, a shameless pander, could not withhold the unfortunate fact that his sister was already married; but he added quickly that the marriage had not been satisfactory to either family, that the two young people were no longer in the mood of a honeymoon, and that Peretti was quite unworthy of so dazzling a woman. Paolo reflected that inconvenient young husbands had often been quietly speeded into a better world. Besides, if Vittoria was really wasting her brilliance upon a mistaken marriage, a gentleman ought, like Saint George, to rescue her before it was too late. Marcello, wandering about the castle, set his wits to work. He, like all the Accoramboni family, had never thought much of Peretti. The lad was not of their class. Vittoria now admitted so much. Nor had Peretti shown any sign that he had even a tenth part of his uncle's genius. Peretti was, in short, nothing but a nuisance. If only she had not insisted upon marrying a nobody, Vittoria might have been queening it in Rome. Clearly, then, it was a brother's duty to unravel her youthful error. There was only one way of dissolving so foolish a

marriage; and Marcello decided to unfold his scheme to Duke Paolo.

He had to admit that Montalto, an important man, was Peretti's uncle; but Montalto was merely one among many Cardinals, not even one of those who were fantastically rich or overwhelmingly powerful (as, for example, Farnese or d'Este or Ferdinando de' Medici), nor, be it noted, was he popular with his fellow-prelates. Marcello soon decided that the murder of young Peretti was well worth the risk; and, so far as we can now see through the fog of diplomatic secrecy, he put his plan frankly before Paolo Giordano, who warm-heartedly agreed that Peretti's life was of no more importance than a tadpole's. And Marcello had already realized that the Duke was a man who could never wait.

Marcello then got to work. His principal rival in the great Duke's favour was the dashing and fearless Lodovico Orsini: but if Marcello could possibly arrange that his lovely sister should marry the widowed Duke, even Lodovico would be forced to play second fiddle. At the same time he carefully cultivated the acquaintance of Lodovico, and there can be no doubt that the two high-spirited young men had much in common. They did not guess that they would soon be tugging in opposite directions, Marcello in behalf of his sister, Lodovico vehemently against her: nor did

they then know that, in combination, they would hound her to death.

First of all, he had, of course, to introduce Paolo to Vittoria. The Duke, naturally, wished to see that Marcello had not over-estimated the sexual magic of his sister. And in order to prepare the way, Marcello had already told Vittoria about his magnificent patron, describing the castle, the vast estate, the large number of dependants who sat down to meals, the dream-like gardens, the open-handedness and good-nature of Paolo Giordano: nor, we may be confident, had this arch-pander neglected to make contemptuous enquiries about the doomed Peretti or to hint that Vittoria had not used her beauty to much purpose. Eventually, it seems, Marcello intimated to his sister that the Duke would be glad to visit her, and to the Duke, that Vittoria did not feel that such a visit would be fair to Peretti; but, nevertheless, Marcello contrived the encounter. We do not know whether, as seems probable, "their murdered man" was present at the interview. If Peretti was there, we have indeed a dramatic situation in real life.

Paolo, although he was forty-three, now walked into the grand passion of his life. Vittoria bewitched him in the moment of their meeting; and at least with one half of her nature she had set out to do so. She wanted wealth, high position, opportunity to express herself:

but there is no reason for supposing that she knew what was in the minds of Paolo and Marcello, or that she foresaw any means of getting free from Peretti. The mystery of sex can sometimes hold young people together when every other aspect of their life is out of harmony; it can also confuse judgement, causing them to fight against a necessary separation; and although Vittoria had now been married for some years, there is evidence that she would have been horrified by a suggestion that Peretti should be quietly "liquidated".

Marcello's murder-plan was put into effect on April the 17th, 1581. He had already secured a confederate in Peretti's household, a woman from Bologna whose name was Caterina; and he schemed to lure Peretti that night to a garden on the slopes of the Quirinal. It was in this garden, which belonged to Paolo, that Paolo used to take his ease during visits to Rome. It was here then that, as dusk fell, Marcello convened some of Paolo's most trustworthy and ferocious rascals. Most of their names read like a catalogue of crimes. No one, for example, would expect mercy from Furio Savorgnano of Udine, but no doubt Fioravante Fioravanti of Bracciano was his match in villainy. The ruffian, however, in whom Marcello put most faith was one who had the nickname of "Lefthand" (Mancino).

This villain, eager to do his duty well, set out with a letter when night was already deep. He knocked at

the door of Vittoria's house in the Via dei Leutari; and Caterina, having opened the door, presented the letter to her young master. Peretti recognized the handwriting of Marcello, his brother-in-law. Marcello was begging him to come at once to the garden of Magnanapoli; but when the letter arrived, Peretti was in bed with Vittoria, and she, learning of its contents, may have guessed at once that some crime was being hatched, for she vehemently asked Peretti not to go out in the darkness of the night to a spot so lonesome. Peretti's mother, too—Camilla—must have been staying with the young people, for the knocking at the door had awakened her also, and she added her warnings to those of Vittoria.

Nevertheless, Peretti knew Marcello, knew him well—or so he fancied; nor was the messenger, Mancino, a stranger. The young man pooh-poohed the warnings of the women, and said that he should certainly answer Marcello's summons. He took with him a serving-man who walked a little ahead, carrying a torch, for the route to the garden of Magnanapoli was exceedingly dark. For some time they stepped onward, turning corner after corner, and presently they began to climb a street that went up the hill to the Quirinal. If the servant had not carried a torch, Peretti could hardly have found his way, but the light by which he could see the landmarks of his journey was the

medium by which his assassins could also see him. Suddenly, in a side-street, there were shots from half a dozen arquebuses. Peretti perhaps did not even hear them, for he had been shot in so many places that he died almost instantly; neither can we censure his unhappy manservant for dashing away from the scene as fast as his legs would carry him. He reported the tragedy to Vittoria and Camilla; and when the general turmoil in the house had somewhat subsided, scared serving-men were sent to inform Cardinal Montalto that his nephew had been murdered. Out of this famous murder came all the other events in the story.

CHAPTER VIII
Of Cardinal Ferdinando De' Medici

A DEATH in the family is an incident which, more than any other, alters the conditions of those who are left behind. Vittoria was impulsive, emotional, even melodramatic; and the sudden disappearance of the husband whom she had so often nagged would certainly have horrified and saddened her. She was also intelligent and must have realized that the Duke of Bracciano had authorized the murder and that her brother Marcello had engineered it. Her emotions were keen and shallow, but, if she soon forgot her sorrow, we ought in justice to remember that in those days violent events were almost to be expected and that, in consequence, a typical soul during the Renaissance was capable of righting itself after any shock.

Camilla, the mother of the murdered man, was more profoundly distressed, and the turmoil of her emotions is melancholy to imagine. She guessed at once who was ultimately responsible for the crime; and it seems that for a short time she suspected Vittoria of having helped Marcello to execute it. The thought of revenge was her only consolation, nor was she ever to get free

of that obsession. Paolo Giordano, in his simple way, frankly rejoiced that his trusty young men had accomplished their work so quickly and so well; but he had, of course, to consider what effect it might have upon Cardinal Montalto. Nobody could foresee how the Cardinal would take it, for he was known to be extremely uncertain.

The position of Marcello became doubly dangerous. Having killed the protégé of one Cardinal, he had now killed the nephew of another, and it was obvious that for the rest of his life he would have to depend entirely upon the favour of Paolo Giordano. Again, if Vittoria consented to marry his master, all might go better than well for Marcello; but if she refused, he would probably be dismissed and thrown to the wolves of Roman justice.

Montalto was no Saint Francis. We cannot even claim that he was a noteworthy example of the Christian spirit, but, nevertheless, he was undoubtedly a first-rate churchman; nor would it be fair to let the reader suppose that he was a Trollopian ecclesiastic who might have climbed to equal success in any other profession. This Cardinal earnestly desired to purify the Church and to reform the morals of his age.

He was, in fact, a born priest, and as a conscientious churchman he had never been absent from a meeting of his fellow-Cardinals. Now, there happened to be a

Consistory on the morning after the murder, and everybody assumed that on this one occasion Montalto would not be present. However, having risen at dawn in order to say a mass for his dead nephew, he duly arrived at the meeting. The Pope (Gregory) was in the chair: and, subtle and well-trained as they were, the Pope and the attendant Cardinals inevitably turned their eyes towards Montalto. They could detect no tremor of emotion. Montalto sat among them with such complete stoicism that some of them wondered whether, by any chance, he had not yet heard the lamentable news. By a stroke of luck we possess a contemporary description of this celebrated moment. It comes from a letter, still preserved at Florence, written to the Grand Duke of Tuscany. "Yesterday at about two in the morning," we read, "certain unknown persons went to the house of Signor Francesco, nephew of Cardinal Montalto and husband of the Corombona, and, under specious pretexts, lured him away and led him to a spot where he was killed by an arquebus and wounded in other ways, so that eventually he was found not far from the gate of Cardinal Sforza di Montecavallo's garden. Up to now, although everybody is chattering about it, we do not know who were the authors of this crime. In spite of this, Montalto, his uncle, turned up this morning in Consistory—perhaps wanting to show how little he can be affected by ties of flesh and blood."

Such imperturbability in an age of "honour" and vendetta was so strange that even the Pope was not sure that he could diagnose it. He was dumbfounded when Montalto proposed, in the true spirit of a Franciscan, that no one should try to discover and to apprehend the culprits because, he said, he had forgiven them their sin. Small wonder, then, if Gregory, getting into his coach when the meeting was over, turned to the man who was helping him and observed, "What a friar that fellow is!"[1]

Gregory, as we know, was easy-going—his family name was Boncompagni (Goodfellow)—and he had never liked the severe personality of Montalto, who, in turn, must have deplored the fact that the Pope had a son: a son of whom we shall learn something notable hereafter. It is likely enough that Montalto was merely dissembling; but he was a just man, and it may be that, not knowing all the facts, he reserved his judgement. He might also have felt that a Cardinal had not enough power to exact full vengeance, especially since Gregory was likely, if anything, to obstruct him. The next Pope (so they surmised) would probably be Cardinal Farnese, one of Montalto's friends, and, if Farnese should

[1] His words were "Costui é un gran' frate!" and they mean, literally, "That one is a great friar!" Italian biographers, who know the fine shades of their language, are agreed that the words contain a tang of dislike and of contempt. "Costui" is, indeed, not a word to be used without care.

be elected, revenge would become easy. Whatever may have been the motives behind Montalto's impassive behaviour, he sustained it for several years. In short, he was an Italian and a born actor.

At this period visits of congratulation or of condolence were important items of social etiquette: and so many notable and long-faced visitors called upon Montalto that he grew weary of assuring them that, as a Christian, he had forgiven the murderers of Peretti. Nevertheless, his stoicism was stretched out almost to snapping-point when Paolo Giordano himself, driving up in an emblazoned coach, asked to see the bereaved Cardinal. Montalto still played his part. Paolo, having deplored the terrible disaster, offered the sympathy of a large-hearted man. If he wished not to confirm the general suspicion, he had, of course, to join the chorus of kindly mourners. Montalto received him graciously, repeated his Christian sentiments and then began to talk about other matters. Vittoria, too, came to condole with him; and—after telling her that she ought now to go back to her parents—he hoodwinked her by expressing a desire that she should keep all the trinkets and other presents which he and the unfortunate Peretti had given to her. He went further. When they parted, he gave Vittoria his blessing.

She, a widow aged twenty-four, obeyed his ghostly counsel, and went "home": but the Accoramboni

household was not at this time a cheerful habitation. Most of Vittoria's brothers were away, for reasons more honourable than those of Marcello; and it was now that she began fully to appreciate the companionship of that delicate-minded musician, Flaminio. Tarquinia still dominated the home, nor is it possible to be sure that she had not winked at the preparations for getting Peretti out of the way. During the last eight years Vittoria had developed from a rosebud into a very exceptional rose; and it had become exasperatingly clear to her mother that if this splendid daughter had not so foolishly insisted upon marrying a nobody, the silly child might have made a spectacular match with some Duke or Prince. We must not forget that those eight years of marriage must have made Vittoria come round to her mother's point of view. Successful men often outgrow the wives whom they wooed in their young days, and sometimes they choose a second partner who will more brilliantly uphold their new position. So it was now with Vittoria, who, at sixteen, had never supposed that her feminine magic was so exceptional as to make her, in some measure, another Helen of Troy. At twenty-four she had realized her power, and we may be right if we suspect that she was not heart-broken by the convenient removal of her juvenile miscalculation.

Paolo was already acquainted with Mario—Vittoria's eldest brother. Mario, an upright abbot who lived at

some distance from the gossip of Rome, may not have learned that the Duke had prepared for a second marriage by contriving an unusually cynical murder. The Duke declared vehemently that he was determined to marry Vittoria. The Abbot deprecated any haste in the matter. After all, propriety has always to be observed, and it would not be decent if Vittoria did not maintain her widowhood for at least twelve months. Paolo, not to be thwarted, then went to consult Vittoria's father-confessor, a man named Maletta. They had several interviews, throughout which the Duke behaved with that humility toward a priest which becomes a layman. At first Maletta repeated the Abbot Mario's objections, and strove, against the full force of Paolo's passionate personality and exalted social position, to keep some hold upon Christian morals and the doctrines of the Church; but Paolo pleaded that for the welfare of his soul he ought to marry a woman for whom he was so urgently lusting, and it may have been this argument, or the persuasion of gold, which finally caused Maletta to assure Vittoria that she need not reject her suitor. Other forces, however, were already working against the infatuated Duke. In particular, Ferdinando (the Medici Cardinal) had made up his mind that this marriage must never be effected: and just as the Capulets and the Montagues could find quarrel in a straw, so did the partisans of Ferdinando come to blows

with the partisans of Paolo. The latter had even adopted as their battle-cry the slogan "Blood or Tears", meaning that their Duke must obtain his woman either by murder or from pity for his unhappy state.

Ferdinando was to play an important part in the lives of Paolo and Vittoria. He was a twisted soul, a congenital puritan, a perfect rationalist, and a representative of a type which exists in every generation. Love, sexual passion and all the bitter-sweet follies of youth were to him as incomprehensible as they have always been to Bernard Shaw. Passion-swayed men, like the Duke of Bracciano, seemed ridiculous to Cardinal Ferdinando. In his view a marriage was merely a family alliance, contracted in order to safeguard property. When the Duke had strangled Isabella, who was, after all, the Cardinal's sister, Ferdinando had seen at once that a cuckolded nobleman could have taken no other course. But when Paolo so absurdly insisted upon marrying that Accoramboni girl who was, from a Medici altitude, so middle-class—well, that was a much more serious matter. Ferdinando would not have made trouble about so degrading a marriage if only this Duke of Bracciano had not begotten two children within the luckless womb of Isabella. And one of those children was a boy—the little Virginio of whom we have already heard. This was quite enough for the conventional soul of Cardinal Ferdinando. The Brac-

ciano property must, of course, be kept in the family—the Medici family. Now, if Paolo—that absurd man who could lose his head about a pretty woman—were to marry again, the boy would probably not inherit the whole of Paolo's money and estate. Cardinal Ferdinando, therefore, decided to fight the boy's battle: and in doing so he had, ironically enough, the support of his powerful brother, the Grand Duke of Tuscany.

Francesco (the Grand Duke) and Ferdinando (the Cardinal) had several extremely awkward conversations about Paolo's determination to marry Vittoria. Francesco, after "living in sin" for several years, had married the brave and irresistible Bianca Capello. She had come from Venice, having run away with a penniless and empty-headed young Florentine. He, like Vittoria's husband, had been murdered, though not by Francesco: and after the murder, the Grand Duke had married the widow. Moreover, at the time of these talks, Bianca was Grand Duchess of Tuscany. The two cases were so much alike that Ferdinando,who had done his utmost to prevent Francesco from marrying Bianca, must have trod delicately when he asked Francesco to help in opposing poor Paolo's determination to marry Vittoria. He need not have worried himself. The Grand Duke, still happily enchanted by his Bianca, had no sympathy to spare for Paolo. He

emphatically agreed with Ferdinando that Paolo's marriage to Vittoria must never take place—never. Paolo's little son, Virginio, had Medici blood in him, the blood of Isabella who had been Francesco's own sister. All Bracciano's property must, of course, be inherited by Virginio. Anything else was unthinkable.

Cardinal Ferdinando was immensely relieved. The Grand Duke had not objected that Paolo desired to do exactly what he himself had done when he had married the enchanting Bianca. On the contrary, he had feigned not to perceive the parallel. And, furthermore, all this perturbation about women must have seemed very odd to the sexless Cardinal. We know, for example—prying into the future—that after the mysterious and rapid deaths of Francesco and Bianca, Ferdinando realized that the Medici family must at all costs be perpetuated; that—however coldly—he sacrificed his inclinations and married (need we say?) a young woman worthy of the Medici; and that, relinquishing his holy calling, he then became another Grand Duke of Tuscany.

Ferdinando, now sure of his ground, spurred the no-saying Pope to bestir himself about Paolo. Monsignor Marzio, therefore, summoned Vittoria to appear before him. She came, supported by Tarquinia and other advocates: only to hear that Gregory the Thirteenth, who cannot have cared two pins about her, forbade her to marry anybody without first obtaining the written

consent of the Pope. Gregory knew that it would be wise, at little cost, to oblige the Medici.

Even so, Paolo was not to be gainsaid. Going back to the humble palazzo of the Accoramboni, he pointed out to Tarquinia and old Claudio that a young widow needed powerful protection and that he was quite willing to supply protection by housing her in his formidable castle. Everything, of course, was to be quite respectable. Paolo, in fact, eagerly wishing to put a patina of respectability upon his infatuation, went so far as to insist that the poor child should be chaperoned by Tarquinia and by the personal maid, Caterina. It was Caterina who had opened the door to Peretti's murderers.

Whenever Cardinal Ferdinando was lucky enough to obtain a few minutes of conversation with the Pope, Gregory was only too delighted if he could assent to the Cardinal's request. All this pother about Paolo Giordano and "the Corombona" seemed to him very tiresome and trivial. No wonder—for the Pope was at this time seriously troubled by the spread of brigandage. Every Duke in Italy was maintaining a body of loyal brigands; and the Duke of Bracciano happened to be one of the worst offenders.

This open brigandage was a scandal which, even with Chicago in mind, we can only just credit. Some of the brigands came of good family. There were, for

example, Petrino Leoncilli, who said that he was a son of Cardinal Farnese, and Alfonso Piccolomini, whose family, as every schoolboy knows, had produced a Pope. Let us hear what two well-known witnesses had to say of these violent men. Giordani states that, often fifty men strong, they would break into the houses of the well-to-do, sometimes blind the inhabitants, carry off furniture and valuables and, having made prisoners of the persons in charge of a district, would either murder them or force them to buy their lives at a heavy price. People, says Giordani, never went out of their houses with any certainty of returning unmolested or of finding, if they did return, that their homes and families were intact. These scoundrels, indeed, used to torture their victims by burning them; and a great many of their prey were thrown into the Tiber. According to Giordani, "day and night, it was robbery and murder."

This appalling condition reached its climax in 1581—just when Michel de Montaigne happened to be visiting Italy: and seeing that he is an old friend of every serious reader, his observations will be of peculiar interest.[1] Somewhat quaintly, he wrote his journal in the third person, and he says that "as M. de Montaigne was leaving the house on horseback to go *in Banchi*, it hap-

[1] *The Diary of Montaigne's Journey to Italy in 1580 and 1581*: edited by E. J. Trechmann. 1929.

pened that they were taking out of prison Catena, a famous robber and captain of banditti, who had kept all Italy in terror, and of whom they related some atrocious murders, especially of two Capuchins, whom he had made to deny God, promising them on that condition to spare their lives, and whom he then massacred without any occasion of gain or revenge. He (Montaigne) stopped to see this spectacle. Besides the forms observed in France, they carry before the criminal a large crucifix covered with a black curtain; and on foot were a great number of men clothed and masked in linen, who, they say, are gentlemen and other eminent people of Rome, and who devote themselves to this service of accompanying criminals led to execution and (also) the bodies of the dead; and they form a brotherhood for that purpose. There are two of those, or monks, clothed and masked in the same way, who stand by the side of the criminal in the cart and exhort him; and one of them continually holds before his face, and makes him incessantly kiss, a tablet on which is the image of Our Lord: this is done in order that the face of the criminal may not be seen as he passes along the street. At the gallows, which is a beam between two supports, they still kept this picture close before his face, till he was thrown off. He made a commonplace death of it, neither moving nor speaking; he was a dark man of thirty or thereabouts. After

he was strangled, they cut him into four quarters. . . . The people here, who had shown no feeling at seeing him strangled, at every blow that was given to hew him in pieces burst into piteous cries."

In another part of the same book, Montaigne tells us that, arriving at Spoleto, "a celebrated and commodious town", he and his companion (who seems to have been a secretary) were "compelled to show our health certificates, not on account of the plague, which at this time was not in any part of Italy, but by reason of the fear which they are in of one Petrino, their fellow-townsman, the most notorious outlawed robber in Italy, and the most famed for his exploits, by whom they and the towns round about are in dread of being surprised."

Gregory strove in vain to suppress these brigands. In July, 1580, he had sent Cardinal Alessandro Sforza at the head of five hundred police to clean up the Papal States, but although Sforza killed fifty brigands at Spoleto, other bands appeared so soon as his back was turned. It was at about this time that Gregory appointed his own son (Giacomo, Duke of Sora) to be commander-in-chief of the Roman police-force, an unhappy appointment, as it turned out, because, fearing for the life of his son, the Pope inclined to give way before the brigands. There was, for example, that terrible young brigand—Alfonso Piccolomini, Duke of Montemar-



VITTORIA ACCORAMBONI

From a contemporary engraving



Alinari

FRANCESCO DE' MEDICI

From the portrait by Il Bronzino in the Pitti Gallery, Florence



Alinari

FERDINANDO DE' MEDICI AS A CHILD

From the painting by Il Bronzino in the Uffizi Gallery, Florence

ciano, who went so far as to call himself "King of the Brigands". He was twenty-five, wore his hair shoulder-long and his beard untrimmed, and his eyes were full of "grim fire".[1] Close to the Sant' Angelo bridge he, at the head of his desperadoes, encountered a body of men belonging to the great Cardinal Farnese and, having routed them, proceeded to the Villa Medici and, either by threats or by promises, used it as his headquarters. All that the Pope could do was to weep over the condition of Rome and to pray that Piccolomini might do no injury to the Duke of Sora. The "King of the Brigands" had now the effrontery to ask the Pope to absolve his sins; and when Gregory had insisted that he must first confess them, he brazenly admitted responsibility for three hundred and seventy murders. Even so, Gregory granted him absolution; and, thus purified, Piccolomini resumed his former position as a respectable member of society. Cardinal Medici (Ferdinando), for example, drove about with him in the former's coach.

The Duke of Sora (Gregory's son) was not entirely inactive. He issued formidable edicts against the brigands, added to the police-force and gave the Pope a bodyguard of thirty Corsicans: but it was impossible for him to achieve much because the Pope was at all times terrified lest the brigands should assault his

[1] Brigante Colonna, *La Nepote di Sisto V*, p. 97.

beloved Giacomo. Most of the Italian Princes, and some of the Cardinals, were themselves interested in maintaining the right to employ hired rascals; but it is obvious that Cardinal Montalto must have deplored the timidity of the Pope and have realized that only a much braver and more resolute pontiff could extirpate the scandal: nor was it long before a highly courageous Pope took this—and other disgraces to Roman society—into strong and capable hands.

CHAPTER IX

Trouble With The Pope

BEFORE carrying his beautiful prize away with him, the Duke of Bracciano had married her in secret, or so he genuinely supposed. It was obvious that he could not venture to marry her openly, and so, meeting in the Accoramboni house, he and she had exchanged declarations of their resolve to unite. A little later, the Duke summoned Caterina, the treacherous Bolognese servant, and, with her as witness, placed a wedding-ring upon Vittoria's finger, saying "Thus do I wed the Lady Vittoria."

When her brother, the Abbot Mario, being a little dubious about the form of this contract, decided to look into the matter, her confessor (Father Maletta) stated that she had accepted the ring with his consent: but Maletta, soon afterwards, became frightened. Hurrying between one and the other, he now told the Duke and Vittoria that they had misunderstood him and had gone too far. He added that even if they could not have a public marriage, they must—for the welfare of their souls—marry each other in a more formal manner. At first Paolo raged, blustered, and even talked wildly

of going to Spain for a long time or possibly for good. The father-confessor managed, however, to calm him a little by suggesting that they should take the opinion of a higher authority, Monsignor Pirro Taro. Not telling him the true facts, they were to ask Monsignor whether two persons who dared not marry in public because, for example, their parents had objected to the match, would be truly married if the contract were completed before a priest, a notary and two witnesses. Paolo—easily infuriated, easily lulled—unwisely followed this advice. Within twenty-four hours of the triple interview, Father Maletta received orders to leave Rome immediately and to make an ecclesiastical tour of inspection. We can be morally certain that Monsignor had consulted Cardinal Ferdinando, and that Ferdinando had suggested the exile of Maletta.

Paolo, thus deserted, now put his offer to the Accoramboni parents, with the result that Vittoria, her mother (Tarquinia) and the inevitable Caterina became his guests. They did not go, however, to the castle at Bracciano. He took them to the Casa Orsini. Not far from this palace he had also another property, known as the Gardens of Monte Magnanapoli, and although Tarquinia and Caterina may have consented to remain in the palace, it is certain that Paolo hid Vittoria in the "Gardens". The Abbot Mario writes that "his Excellency took my sister home as though she were his wife

because she is not safe in our house; adding that he would return her intact."

A list of the Duke's gifts to her while they sojourned at Magnanapoli reveals the delight of his heart:

A silver basin and a silver decanter, both gilded and decorated with embossed scenes.
Twenty silver plates.
Two silver candlesticks.
A silver jug and wash-hand basin.
A large basin and a large jug, both silver, for washing the head.
A silver dressing-table with a silver-edged mirror.
A golden chain of thirty links.
A necklace of gold inlaid with enamel.
A clock-case ornamented with diamonds, rubies, and with twenty pearls, small diamonds and other jewels.
A golden unicorn with a body made from mother-of-pearl.
A golden galley adorned with rubies, and a golden ship adorned with small rubies.
A golden spray with pearls and other jewels.
A bureau constructed of Indian reeds.[1]

Vittoria had certainly come into her own, and it is likely enough that at this time she did not much care about the validity of her new marriage and hardly at

[1] Obviously a great rarity in those times.

all resented her seclusion in the "Gardens". The public at least was quite certain that the Duke had properly married her in a neighbouring church. Indeed, the public added the melodramatic statement that the ceremony had been performed under cover of a blustering night. It went further. It whispered of a sorceress from Greece who supplied Vittoria with marvellous love-philtres, thus readily accounting for Paolo's extreme infatuation. The enchantress, however, was more real than the blustering night, but it is impossible to find out much about her. We know that she died in strange company, and that is all.

Montalto still maintained his stoical attitude; but his sister, Camilla, was determined to wreak vengeance upon the murderers of her boy. Cardinal Ferdinando, too, was working deftly against—and yet also on behalf of—his brother-in-law, Paolo Giordano. It was he, no doubt, who galvanized the Pope into action. The Pope, in fact, set up a Committee of Inquiry whose duty it was to find out who had murdered Peretti. It was also Cardinal Ferdinando who (somewhat mysteriously) introduced to the notice of the Committee a gentleman-brigand, one Pallentieri. This young man had been banished from Rome on account of a squabble with a relative of the Pope. He had also got himself into trouble because at one time not only had he quarrelled with Peretti, but had wounded him. He

now wrote a letter in which he avowed that Peretti had tried to poison him and that, as a natural consequence, he had returned secretly to Rome and had shot his enemy. It seems more than unlikely that he had done anything of the kind. Peretti had been murdered by Paolo's henchmen, carefully instructed by Marcello Accoramboni; and there is no reason for supposing that Paolo had, for a day or two, added this Pallentieri to his gang of ruffians. We must therefore suppose that Cardinal Ferdinando, under whose protection Pallentieri existed, had ordered him to make a false and perilous "confession". Ferdinando's motive, if we are right, would have been to safeguard Paolo himself from being charged with the murder; and this, as we know, would be "in character", for Ferdinando had a profound respect for high rank. Pallentieri was probably, therefore, a bribed scapegoat.

When the Committee had rejected Pallentieri's confession, the Pope, or his son (Giacomo, Duke of Sora), was forced to act; and, summoning the Governor of Rome, they charged him to take a band of robust city-policemen and to bring forth the errant Duke of Bracciano, or failing that, to secure the persons of any among the retainers who might know something about the murder of Peretti. The Governor, therefore, marched with his armed policemen to the Casa Orsini, only to find that Paolo was not at home. He was, if

the truth is to be told, dallying with Vittoria in the Gardens of Magnanapoli. Nevertheless, there was something of a battle between the police and Paolo's devoted brigands, who fired from the windows. The brigands, for the moment, triumphed; but, the next morning, up came the Governor once more, demanding to see Paolo—and to bring him to Rome. Paolo, having spent the night at Magnanapoli with Vittoria, was asleep when his enemy arrived; and, having been waked up, he sent word to the Governor of Rome that "there never was a time when such a personage could break in upon the slumber of a Duke!" The crestfallen Governor satisfied himself by nailing to the Duke's door a proclamation which required the presence in a Roman law-court of those who had murdered Peretti and those who were responsible for the murder. Paolo, appearing belatedly before the Governor, now undertook to arrest the murderers of Peretti.

The Pope was not satisfied. Paolo assured him that the murderers had fled; but Gregory replied that if the Duke of Bracciano would not deliver them up to justice, then the Duke would have to pay a fine of ten thousand scudi.[1] There can be no question that

[1] So far as the writer can discover, this sum would at the time have been equivalent to about five thousand pounds; but even the Italian Embassy cannot name the true equivalent in modern money. I owe thanks to the Embassy, which replied with the courtesy which we should expect from Italians.

Cardinal Ferdinando de' Medici was now the puppet-master, for the Pope, worried by many affairs and in particular by the brigands who menaced the life of his son, set up a commission to find out what priest, if any, had married Paolo to Vittoria. It is now, perhaps, that we may begin to pity these lovers, the one so wildly in love with the beauty of a woman, the other so eager to drink from the bowl of glory. Paolo and Vittoria were henceforth to be hunted like a stag and a doe until they were cornered; and it is clear that Paolo had found in Vittoria his perfect woman, the ideal lover, and that Vittoria, more worldly than he, had tasted at least some promise of the brilliant and expensive life which she had always longed for.

The Pope's officers carried out their work so conscientiously that every priest within practicable range was brought to Rome and required to say whether he had officiated at a marriage of Paolo and Vittoria. Many of them came trembling from small country parishes. All of them denied having had anything to do with the scandalous affair.

Paolo in desperation asked for, and received, an audience with the Pope; but Gregory was inflexible and commanded Paolo to send Vittoria back to her parents. In vain did Paolo declare that he had married her. Gregory, mindful of the Medici, would not admit that the marriage was valid. He went so far as to order

that Paolo should not write or speak to Vittoria or communicate with her in any way whatsoever, not even through an intermediary. At the same time he sent a written pronouncement to Vittoria, forbidding her to go out of her father's house except for the purpose of hearing Mass. Vittoria obeyed the Pope's order. Moreover, the Abbot Mario and the priest Maletta were examined, found guilty of conniving at the so-called marriage, and sent to prison.

The Duke was so violently upset at being thus thwarted that he took to his bed; and it is startling to learn that the Pope's son and Cardinal Ferdinando—who was responsible for all this trouble—were among the many visitors who called to see how the patient was progressing. Ferdinando took the opportunity of pointing out that if Paolo persisted in his crazy intention of marrying the Accorambona he would estrange the Pope, the Grand Duke of Tuscany and even the high and mighty King of Spain. The Cardinal, who was nothing if not tactful, spoke with such effect that Paolo, shattered by conflicting emotions, finally undertook to renounce Vittoria for ever. Nevertheless, as might be expected, he could not endure to be parted from her and did not intend to submit to the Pope without several more struggles. In fact, when Gregory took his summer holiday, using a magnificent country palace which Cardinal Altemps, a German, had put at his disposal,

Paolo drove up one day, intending to cajole Gregory into lifting the marriage ban. Paolo was incapable of understanding that he could not have anything upon which he had set his heart: but Gregory was enjoying a luxurious holiday, at the expense of the German Cardinal, and, having no intention of hearing again the tedious arguments of the enamoured Duke, he refused even to grant him an interview.

The Duke, furious and dejected, then stayed for several weeks at the Villa Tivoli, that sumptuous and exquisite monument to the fine taste of Cardinal Ippolito d'Este. Perhaps in the hope of intimidating his opponents, he now added a considerable number of new brigands to his household at Bracciano. Such an action does at least look like a gesture of defiance toward the obdurate Pope. Then by a stroke of luck he had to attend the wedding of Cesare d'Este and Virginia de' Medici (who was only thirteen), an event which not only brought him to the loveliest of all villas, the Villa d'Este,[1] but into close contact with the formidable Medici brothers. The beauty of their surroundings put them into a melting mood; and when the Duke had assured them that he had quite given up the mad notion of marrying the Accorambona, but that, at the same time, he felt insulted by the Pope's decree against his

[1] Brigante Colonna says that the staff at the Villa included fifty Turkish slaves who had been captured at Lepanto.

even seeing or communicating with her, Cardinal Ferdinando lent a sympathetic ear. The Cardinal, in fact, having returned to Rome, persuaded Gregory to revoke this particular decree.

All might have gone well if only the Duke had not been so impetuous and so simple-minded. He ruined the whole situation, however, by hurrying instantly to the Accoramboni house, exuberantly announcing that Vittoria was now as free as a swallow, and once more carrying her off in triumph to the Gardens at Magnanapoli.

This was, of course, not at all what Ferdinando de' Medici had intended or expected; and he was now in the unusual position of being in very hot water with the Pope. Gregory was furious because he thought that Ferdinando had tricked him, and Ferdinando was at least intensely annoyed because he himself had been short-circuited by Paolo. Francesco de' Medici wrote a very stern letter about the whole proceeding; and to crown poor Paolo's astonishment and dismay came a haughty missive from Philip of Spain, cancelling the Duke's right (as a Grandee of Spain) to receive taxes upon Neapolitan silk. Gregory lost no time. He hurled a fresh decree at the unhappy Duke, threatening to fine him twenty-five thousand ducats if he did not at once return Vittoria to her parents and undertake to have nothing whatsoever to do with her. Paolo, kissing

the rod, took Vittoria home again, but, in spite of the peril, he continued to visit her. In vain did old Claudio (her father) secure an audience. "Does the Duke go to your house?" growled Gregory, "and does he hold converse with your daughter? Very well, then! This interview is over!"

On the very next day, all the streets which lay close to the Accoramboni "palace" having been lined with police, the sheriff entered the house and demanded that Vittoria should follow him. He put her into a coach. Owing, presumably, to changes of mind on the part of the Pope, the bewildered girl was driven first to the Corte Savelli prison, then to a nunnery, and in the end to that formidable and famous prison, the Castle of Saint Angelo. They took her there in December, 1581, only the third part of a year having passed since the murder of Francesco Peretti. And yet, throughout all these turmoils and changes, Cardinal Montalto had done nothing and had not said a word.

CHAPTER X

Vittoria Sent To Prison

DURING this period there was a remarkable and highly audacious little newspaper. The name of it was *Avvisi di Roma*, or as we should say, the *Rome News*. It was a manuscript newspaper which came out on Wednesdays and Saturdays, and the contributors were anonymous. Owing, of course, to its outspoken comments upon any ecclesiastical or scandalous matter of immediate interest to the public, it had so great a success that it was imitated at Venice, Antwerp and Amsterdam, and also in Spain and France.

How daring it was we shall soon see, and, having seen, may well be surprised that it should have lasted from 1555 until 1648. We shall be less surprised that two pontiffs attempted to suppress it. Of these Gregory was one. The other had been Pius the Fifth, who, in 1572, banned the paper on the ground that it issued "news which is injurious even if true, and pretends to forecast events and to reveal secrets of Church government".[1] It was, in short, so up to date, by our standards, that it made a speciality of "inside information".

[1] Domenico Gnoli.

The *Rome News* has something to say about several of our acquaintances. On January the 20th, 1581, it informed its readers that "Signor Marcello Accoramboni has gone into the country with a good many other persons, apparently as exiles". A year later, on January the 20th, 1582, the *News* tells us that Mancino ("Left-hand") has been apprehended—as being suspected of having lured Francesco Peretti from his home on the night of the murder. Mancino was put to torture and interrogated; and when interrogated a second time, without torture (February 24th, 1582), he declared that the murder of Peretti had been instigated by Tarquinia (Vittoria's mother) and Caterina, the Bolognese maid. He also stated that the murder had been carried out by Marcello Accoramboni and two associates who, in turn, had been inspired by someone (Paolo) whose name the presiding judge suppressed.

Meanwhile, Cardinal Montalto had been, as everybody thought, retiring more and more into his shell. He took no part in the efforts to track down the murderers of his nephew. The truth is that he was still at loggerheads with the Pope and that he thought it wise to become as inconspicuous as possible. Only a year earlier Gregory, driving past Montalto's villa (the "Villa del Peretti"), had observed, "Poor Cardinals do not build palaces", and had straightway imposed upon Montalto a heavy fine. Montalto, in turn, remarked

to the Cardinals and the Ambassadors from whom he received visits that the Pope was "pusillanimous and dares not put down our public enemies for fear lest they shall kill his son Giacomo". The Cardinal's bowl of trouble was, at this time, brimming. His niece Maria died. She was a sister of the murdered nephew: and many persons foolishly believed the rumour that she had been poisoned by Vittoria's Greek sorceress. She had also been the mother of four children, and one of her two daughters was destined to close up the quarrel between the Peretti and the Orsini. In a word, this little girl was to marry Virginio, son of Paolo Giordano. Moreover, the *Rome News* informs us, with engaging frankness, that "since his Holiness rescinded the income which, as to a poor Cardinal, he had accorded to Cardinal Montalto, his Eminence has been very little seen and has not followed his old custom of attending consistories, but rather has concentrated upon the building of Santa Maria Maggiore. . . ." Two of his influential friends—Cardinal Sforza and Cardinal Orsini —had also died: but, as some compensation for the loss of them, Montalto now drew closer to the cold and sinister Cardinal Ferdinando de' Medici. The two Cardinals came together because both of them deplored the infatuation which Vittoria had aroused in Paolo. For the sake of clarity, and at the risk of tedium, let us recollect that Paolo had married a Medici, Ferdinando's

sister, and was now struggling to make an effective marriage with a woman (Vittoria) of much inferior rank; that Montalto opposed such a marriage because he rightly suspected Paolo of having arranged the murder of Peretti in order that he might be able to obtain the beautiful Accorambona; and that Cardinal Ferdinando opposed the marriage because he wished that Paolo's money should not go to the upstart Vittoria but to the son whom Isabella had borne to Paolo.

Old Gregory, meanwhile, seems still to have been mostly concerned with the danger which was threatening his dear son Giacomo from the private brigands who were maintained by the neighbouring princes. In no other way can we explain his conciliatory behaviour toward the Duke of Bracciano, who was, perhaps, the worst offender as a patron of hired murderers. The Pope suggested that Paolo should go, with fifty thousand infantry, to the help of the Duke of Savoy, who was at war with Genoa. He also proposed that Giacomo's daughter (his own grandchild) should marry Paolo's little son, Virginio, and even offered two hundred thousand scudi as a dowry. These were bribes. We do not know whether, or how deeply, his Holiness was in debt to the Medici, but it is obvious that he was trying to buy Paolo away from Vittoria. Paolo, somewhat impressed, went back to his castle and wrote to say that, having no further intention of

marrying Vittoria, he put himself at the Pope's disposal. He wrote the same message to the Medici brothers and to the Pope's son: but we shall soon see how Vittoria's magic overturned the rational decisions of her lover.

For the time being, Vittoria was in prison at the Castle of Saint Angelo. Her conditions, however, were easy. The governor of the prison, one Napoleone Malvagia, lived there together with his family. Vittoria was soon on the best of terms with all of them. Malvagia gave orders that she was to be treated as though she were a duchess and that she was to be called the Duchess of Bracciano. He may have thought that these arrangements were a harmless sop to her vanity or he may have supposed that her title would soon be valid beyond all dispute. Certainly he had seen some of Paolo's letters in which the Duke had addressed Vittoria as his "duchess and wife". Vittoria would make sure that he should see them.

So amiable was the relationship of prisoner and gaoler that when Malvagia's wife gave birth to a daughter, in the June of 1582, Vittoria offered to hold it at the font, and not only was her offer gratefully accepted but the happy parents decided to give their new baby the name of Vittoria. This delight in taking the children of other women to the baptismal ceremony was one of Vittoria's most surprising characteristics. Gnoli, rummaging

among ancient archives, discovered evidence that Vittoria played this particular part on seven or eight occasions: and this evidence, considered together with the fact that she did not (and probably could not) bear a child either to Peretti or to Paolo, should make us reflect that she may have been barren and that, had she been pregnable, her character and her life might have been altogether different. The reader may think at first that a young woman of so worldly a disposition probably did not want children and purposely obstructed impregnation: but we must bear in mind that sixteenth-century contraceptives were crude and unreliable; that the pregnant woman, as the painting of the period will show us, was a Renaissance ideal; and that, if she could have borne a child to Peretti, she would have been able to rely upon the generous help, in perpetuity, of Cardinal Montalto. It seems, therefore, to be likely that the most beautiful woman of her time was, biologically, a blind-alley, and that in consequence Vittoria never really grew up.

Let us remember at this point that the Pope, whatever may have been his motive, had held a dazzling bait before the open mouth of the simple Paolo. He, miserable man, was already deep in social disgrace by reason of his passion for Vittoria, but, at the same time, inextricably in love with her. Sometimes he felt that the world might be well lost: at other times he struggled to get

out of the mesh, to recapture his old position in society and all those flatteries, all those wafts of incense, which come to an important man who has not outraged the code of his set. Now again he had decided to break free from his ill-starred entanglement. Now again he had set his will against his passion. And we must remember that few men among all the millions of our kind endure the agonies of that absolute sexual enchantment which is so powerfully delineated in Somerset Maugham's novel *Of Human Bondage* and in Hazlitt's *Liber Amoris*. Most men live and die without even coming close to that foretaste of hell; and they who have to pass through it, as Paolo Giordano did, realize that they are as foolish as anyone is who seeks to find a hoard of gold at the end of the rainbow and, in most cases, that the woman whose beauty has bewitched them is, if seen with clear eyes, not worth winning. And yet, being enthralled, as Hazlitt was, by a girl of mediocre mind and commonplace personality, these doomed men cannot find a way out of the enchanted wood without undergoing a spiritual amputation.

Paolo decided to renounce Vittoria, and so to get free of all his accumulating difficulties. He wrote to her—on a day of July in 1582: and he addressed the letter not to "The Duchess of Bracciano", as he had done so often in the past, but to "The Lady Vittoria Corambona".

This letter duly arrived at the Castle of Saint Angelo,

and Vittoria, recognizing the hand and also the seal upon the letter, opened it with foreboding. Why should Paolo, her devoted slave, have addressed the letter in her maiden name, and so give rise at once to much rumour and undesirable comment among the prison staff? She read with horror that Paolo, finding that their marriage had not been legal, and that a marriage between him and her had been expressly forbidden by the Pope, now desired to put his conscience at ease and, with that object, assured her that she was entirely free. Vittoria's mind went black. Completely anaesthetic, in the way of self-willed women, to the perplexities of her lover, she felt that this man, this wild lover, this good-for-nothing Paolo Giordano, Duke of Bracciano, had tired of her, taken what he wanted and callously thrown her to the dogs. She recognized also that if the Duke had done with her, she could not possibly obtain any position in Roman society. Everybody knew that she and the Duke had been lovers: lovers much too soon, by the code of the age, after the murder of her husband. If she was to have no splendid future, Vittoria decided that life was not worth a candle. She ran to the parapet of the Castle of Saint Angelo, intending to dash herself to death: and she was so highly strung that we may believe her intention to have been genuine; but, as happens so often, a serving-maid was close at hand, caught Vittoria by her clothes, and pulled her back

into the world of love, danger and intrigue. The *Rome News* assures us, on July the 18th, 1582, that "it is quite true that she wanted to throw herself out of a window".

Paolo, as we should expect, was received back by all his old and influential friends, as one who had solved their troubles by renouncing Vittoria and returning to the fold of respectability. Only he knew how insecure his new respectability was, for he must have realized that, "would she but turn her face", he would "know the folly of being comforted".

Gregory, we must know, had, just at this time, reformed the calendar. Our dates, therefore, become a little bewildering: but, being so conscious of this Pope's weaknesses, we ought, on the credit side, to remember that it was he who regulated the clocks of the Western World in true accord with the circlings of our earth round the sun.

On August the 10th, 1582, Vittoria's mother obtained a morning audience with Gregory. They had a long conversation, but nothing came of it. Gregory was obdurate, and Tarquinia had to go home with her tail between her legs. It was, in fact, old Borromeo—scholar, humanist, a man completely disinterested and a Cardinal immune from any taint of worldliness—who tilted the no-saying mind of the Pope. Borromeo observed to Gregory, "If Vittoria is criminal, punish her: if she is innocent, set her free." Gregory, having

the issue put so plainly before him, saw the truth but wriggled again. He could not say "Yes". He had, temperamentally, to play for safety. He therefore ordered that Vittoria was to be set free from the prison at the Castle of Saint Angelo, but only if she consented to leave Rome, to live with her parents at Gubbio (whither they must, at this time, have betaken themselves), and if, threatened by a fine of ten thousand ducats, she should keep herself far away from the Duke of Bracciano.

Influenced by the humane Cardinal Borromeo, Gregory the Thirteenth had set Vittoria free. She went, as he had bidden her, to the family home at Gubbio. Her parents, presumably, had returned there for two reasons: that old Claudio was not prospering as an advocate at Rome, and that the scandal about Vittoria had caused Roman "society" to cold-shoulder them.

Gubbio, however, was, even in those days, not impracticably far from Rome: and we next hear of a visit which Vittoria paid to the Pope. The *Rome News*, fortunately (but also, perhaps, fancifully), gives us an account of this interview. The scribe says that "On Sunday evening, at about sunset, another sun rose up—the lovely, charming and winsome Lady Vittoria Corambona, accompanied by her parents.[1] Having

[1] "Parenti" might mean "relatives", but here it is likely to mean Claudio and Tarquinia.

come to his Holiness by a secret way, they implored him to consider the long suffering of the poor prisoner, the anguish endured by a divorced woman and all the misery of an exile. And this having been said, the sad exile threw herself at the feet of his Holiness, while her parents stood by, and, with melting voice, tearful eyes and hands clasping her breast, spoke like another Sophonisba addressing another Massinissa, and said, sighing, 'Blessed and Holy Father, if, after so much travail by reason of the loss of my husband, after my imprisonment, after so many other misfortunes which have befallen me, I had not a pure conscience and could not hope for your holy blessing, I should have deserved, young as I am, everything which I have suffered: but, knowing that your Holiness in his wisdom can see all things clearly, and that, if in some ways I did wrong, your Holiness will realize that I did so because I was overborne by the affection and the splendour of a certain nobleman who is well known to your Holiness, I, therefore, make so bold as confidently to hope—not for pardon, but to awaken mercy within the bosom of your Holiness: seeing that, if the truth be told, I cannot believe that a young woman of high integrity, deceived and in great distress, could vainly implore your pity, especially since I come of that blood which, by your grace, has received so much glory. (It is hard to know what her meaning can have been.) Wherefore, in order

that our family shall not be over-gloomed, I beg that I may not be sent out of my country, away from my parents and those of my blood, for, were it so, I, who am wounded to death, should suffer yet more wounds, and therefore, with all the urgency which I can express, I commit to your Holiness my destiny and my innocent intentions.'

"All this," cries Colonna, "in one breath!" [1] We need not suppose that Vittoria really uttered these long-winded periods. They flowed from the quill of a journalist who obviously had failed to achieve fame as a poet: and indeed, it was, apparently, the aim of most Renaissance writers in Italy to compose the longest sentences which they could evolve. They believed that the longer the sentence, the nobler the style.

According to the *Rome News*, Vittoria's magniloquence had some effect upon Gregory. "The Pope", we read, "hearkened to the prayers of this distressed nymph, prayers which were accompanied by streams of tears and by a tumult of soul which would have softened the hardest stone; and the Pope, as the very prince of mercy and pity, and yet foreseeing that worse might come of it all, gave her the kindliest of benedictions and the gentlest promises of his paternal solicitude, and therewith undertook to grant that for which

[1] The version given by the *Rome News* is even more continuous and would-be Ciceronian than our simplified version in English.

she had prayed but, nevertheless, only upon condition that she should obey him and go back to Gubbio." Vittoria had not achieved much, it is true; but she had talked with the Pope and had made a good impression upon him.

Before leaving Rome, she took the opportunity of calling upon Cardinal Montalto. Her pretext was a desire to learn from him whether she ought to dress as a widow or as a wife. According to the *Rome News*, "the aforesaid lady visited and kissed the hand of Cardinal Montalto, who embraced her with incredible tenderness, as though she were rather his daughter than his niece-in-law: and, in reply to her question, he answered cuttingly that she ought to dress in a 'piebald' style, as became her position".[1]

Not wholly displeased by her visit to Rome, Vittoria travelled back to the family mansion at remote but beautiful Gubbio. We realize at once the poor texture of her soul when we find that her first act was to write to Paolo, asking him to forward certain presents which he had given to her: and when we know that he dispatched them without enclosing any message, we see how desperately he was trying to dispel her enchantment. It must have been difficult indeed for

[1] In "abito lionato" are the Italian words. They mean, literally, "in tawny clothes", or, as we might say, half and half. It was, in fact, the colour used for half-mourning.

the impetuous Paolo not to write a few words to the woman he adored. He merely forwarded the trinkets.

For the time being, all was quiet. The Abbot Mario, who had been so unjustly imprisoned, was set free and returned to Rome, and in a short time he obtained a post in the household of the enlightened Cardinal d'Este. Even Mancino ("Lefthand") was liberated and sent back to his home-town, Fermo, on condition that he should not leave it.

On January the 3rd, 1583, Vittoria, obviously bored by the dull "society" at Gubbio, wrote to Gregory, and here is her letter.

Most blessèd Father,

Having been considered worthy, when I left Rome, to kiss the sacred feet of your Holiness, I now make bold (confident that his Holiness, being so good and so kind, will recollect how glad I was to comply when he so wisely counselled me to remain at Gubbio) to ask that he should realize how fully I have obeyed him, and to beg his Holiness to wipe out my afflictions. Now, therefore, in behalf of my honour and reputation, not wishing to be regarded as a criminal, I throw myself at your most sacred feet, begging, by the wounds of Jesus Christ, that you will raise your ban, assuring you that upon pain of death I will obey you if I win mercy from you (as would become your holy and kind-hearted nature), and that while I live,

I will pray that your Holiness may enjoy a long and happy life. From Gubbio, the 3rd of January, 1583.

Your blessèd Holiness's

most humble and most devoted servant,

VITTORIA ACCORAMBONI.

She had hoped to melt Gregory's heart. She had hoped that he would consent to a marriage between herself and Paolo. The Pope's reply, written by the hand of Monsignor Pirro Taro, disappointed and angered her. There were to have been legal proceedings, it is true, against her father and her brother, the abbot, and these, she now learned, would be dropped. This meant that the Duke of Bracciano might again visit the Accoramboni family without getting the family into hot water. Moreover, Gregory withdrew his stipulation that Vittoria was to remain at Gubbio; but the decree of May the 5th was still to stand. By this decree Vittoria was forbidden to marry anybody, and were she to contract a marriage, it would be regarded as null and void. Another important churchman, however, intervened, and on February the 11th, 1583, Gregory issued the statement that "his Holiness permits Lady Vittoria Accorambona to marry any person excepting that particular person whom his Holiness has forbidden her to marry". Monsignor Bianchetti and also Monsignor Pirro Taro wrote to Vittoria on the following day, each of them seeming to think that

she would be delighted with the results of their intervention. It was perhaps just as well that she did not answer Pirro Taro's note until another nine days had cooled her mind. Then, possibly assisted by members of the household at Gubbio, she wrote:

Reverend and illustrious Monsignor,

I thank your Lordship with a full heart for the news which you have given me about the notable kindness of his Holiness in thinking me worthy to be set at liberty and no longer harassed by possible lawsuits, and I recognize that this has been done solely because of his Holiness's goodness. I shall not fail, on my side, to show by my conduct how earnestly I mean to obey his Holiness, as I have always done, nor be lacking in gratitude, nor cease to pray daily that he may enjoy a long and happy life. Remembering also my indebtedness to your Lordship, who has been so extremely kind, I beg you to think favourably of me and to regard me as being yours to command. Wishing you every happiness, I kiss your hands. From Agubio the 21st of February, 1583.

Your reverend Lordship's
most grateful sister,[1]
VITTORIA ACCORAMBONA.

Having sealed this letter, Vittoria, doubtless with the help of Caterina the Bolognese, packed her luggage, and jolted along the road to Rome.

[1] The word is, of course, purely formal.

Paolo, more than a little pleased to find himself once more *persona grata* with his important friends, now exuberantly suggested to the Pope that he, Paolo, should take four galleys and sweep away all the pirates who were infesting the Mediterranean Sea. He could easily provide, he said, the four galleys and the galley-slaves. He was, no doubt, quite confident that he could extract the money for this project from the Grand Duke of Tuscany. After all, the Grand Duke would be only too pleased to pay Paolo for keeping away from Vittoria. Paolo went so far, even, as to arrange that Lodovico, assuming the title of General Lodovico degli Orsini, should assist in leading his forces. As usual, however, Pope Gregory was unable to say "Yes".

CHAPTER XI

False Happiness

THE Duke, glooming and raging by turns in his own fortress at Bracciano, may have been thankful to have the company of his young and high-spirited kinsman, Lodovico Orsini. Lodovico, it is true, was so proud of the family that the Duke could not expect him to talk about Vittoria with enthusiasm; but there can be no doubt that the young man was a stimulating companion. He certainly added mustard to the Duke's wrath when Giacomo, the Pope's son, captured a band of their private brigands and hanged four grooms, one of Paolo's and three of Lodovico's. The two Orsini endured a whole week of chagrin before taking their revenge: but then, on an evening in September, a gentleman named Vitelli went to dine with the Pope's son. On his way home after nightfall, accompanied by six serving-men, Vitelli was shot at by ten of Lodovico's myrmidons, who, having wounded him and being naturally anxious to prove their valour, battered out his brains with their arquebuses.

Giacomo, well aware that Lodovico was responsible for this murder, wanted to have him tried in a special

court for an offence against the State, and in this desire the Head of the Police had ample support from other notable officers; but the mere suggestion of such a trial threw the Pope into an agony of terror. Lodovico had already proved himself to be a daredevil. If Giacomo proceeded against him, no one could foretell what might ensue. The Venetian Ambassador, reporting home, said that the Pope may have restrained his son "because he does not think the matter of so much importance as others think it to be, or perhaps because he suspects that Signor Lodovico might put proposals before Signor Alfonso Piccolomini of a kind which might some day injure Signor Giacomo." Piccolomini, "King of the Brigands", seems at all times to have terrorized the Pope. Gregory, in fact, when approached about the unfortunate incident, merely remarked that Lodovico was a good lad and that Vitelli ought to have defended himself more skilfully.

However, Lodovico decided that he had better go elsewhere, and in the upshot he offered his services to the Venetian Republic. He wrote to the Grand Duke of Tuscany, calmly admitting the murder and quaintly excusing himself for not having challenged Vitelli to a duel on the ground that "duelling is against the Sacred Canon". Giacomo and the dead Vitelli had friends, nevertheless, who were sufficiently influential to force the Pope's hesitant hand. A decree was issued com-

manding the attendance at Rome of everybody connected with the murder, and in the long list of names which are cited in this document we come upon that of "Lefthand". Far from going back to Rome and so walking into dire danger, Lodovico paid a visit to the Medici brothers at Florence. Here he was warmly welcomed, and we may safely suppose that this was the fatal time when Francesco, Ferdinando and Lodovico formed a triple alliance against Paolo and Vittoria.

Paolo had already petitioned the Pope, through the intervention of the Spanish Ambassador, for a safe-conduct to Loreto, whither, he said, he wished to go as a humble pilgrim; and he had adroitly timed his petition so that it should afford him an alibi in respect of Vitelli's murder. For some inexplicable reason Gregory not only issued the safe-conduct but requested Paolo to go not as a pilgrim but in pomp and pride as the Pope's military adviser who was to examine the fortifications at Ancona. They might be attacked by the still-smarting Turks. The Duke, who was finding his love-affair so difficult to nourish, now seized his opportunity. Having duly inspected the fortifications, he wrote to Vittoria, who was for a little while back again in her childhood's home at Gubbio, suggesting that she should pack up and join him at Trevi. She came at once. He was, after all, her doorway to freedom, wealth and a sumptuous life. How much she

loved him we who are now living can never learn, but she must have known, as he did, that by reuniting they were risking a new offensive from all the powerful persons who were allied against them; nor is it merely sentimental to guess that Vittoria must have felt some admiration for a man—so important that every step which he took was immediately known to the world —who cared so much for her as to flout the Medici, the Pope, the King of Spain and even his boon-companion, Lodovico. The lovers drove back to their castle at Bracciano, the Duke, with characteristic recklessness, completely disregarding the publicity of their actions.

It is now that they were at the happiest period of their lives. What did Paolo care if the wags in Rome had nicknamed him "Duke Accorambono"? Had he not fought in the famous Battle of Lepanto? Was that not a manly feat, never to be forgotten by the world? Had he not strangled his first wife, as a real man should, when he had discovered her infidelity? No one could seriously say that he was effeminate: and as for the wilder depths of "love", the little wags in Rome were presumably incapable of a grand passion. Vittoria, riding about the vast estate in its autumnal beauty, was delighted with all that she saw. She was not less delighted to be the chatelaine of that massive castle and to feel that the treasures which it contained were now virtually her own possessions. Moreover, the

Duke, far from tiring of her beauty or her companionship, seems at this time to have become more devoted than ever. Small wonder if there was a general whisper that the Greek sorceress crept out at night to the edge of the great lake and gathered simples with which to prepare more love-philtres for the already enchanted Paolo. Marcello, too, was back again at Bracciano, and, of course, the inevitable Caterina remained in attendance upon her ladyship.

Once more did Paolo return to the notion of marrying her. Monsignor Pirro Taro's letter to Vittoria in which he stated that all thought of legal action had now been abandoned, bestirred Paolo to fancy that at last other people would allow him to have his way; and his joy was beyond measure when, having consulted various priests, they replied that not only could he marry Vittoria but that, for the welfare of his soul, it was his duty to do so. Paolo immediately, on October the 10th, summoned a lawyer from Gubbio, a man named Pompilio Longo, and, in the presence of three other persons (one of them a priest from the seminary at Bracciano), they drew up the terms of a marriage-settlement: a document which is still extant in the parish registers at the church of Santo Stefano. After this, going to the college church, the "archpriest" blessed the wedding-ring and duly married his master and mistress. There were exuberant and vinous rejoic-

ings in the castle at Bracciano, the Duke's private brigands throwing care to the winds.

And for the next few days

> There rose a noise of striking clocks,
> And feet that ran, and doors that clapt,
> And barking dogs and crowing cocks,—

in fact,

> The palace bang'd and buzz'd and clackt.

for Paolo and Vittoria, with astounding confidence, decided to go in all their greatest magnificence to Rome. On October the 22nd, 1583, the *Rome News* boldly announced that "There have been grand doings at the house of Signor Paolo Giordano, his Excellency having arrived in Rome with superb coaches, with carriages and other rich paraphernalia, nor is it doubted here that his lady herself is not at Bracciano, seeing that she is regarded by him as his legitimate spouse."

Paolo was living in such an earthly paradise, although it was also a fool's paradise, that when he received an invitation to the important wedding of Prince Vincenzo Gonzaga of Mantua to eighteen-year-old Eleonora de' Medici, he could not be bothered to go and merely sent Onorio Savelli to represent him. This was the more surprising, because the young bride was the eldest daughter of Francesco, the Grand Duke, and we have already seen that, as a rule, Paolo was eager to

stand well with his powerful and debt-paying brother-in-law.

A few months later we catch a glimpse of his coruscating soul-state in a letter which one historian terms "a masterpiece of impudence". It is a letter written, in the fashionably deep-lung'd style of the period, to Cardinal Ferdinando.

Most illustrious and most revered milord cousin and most honoured patron,

Having learned that many persons do not cease to scatter rumours and that they labour to make the world believe that I have contracted a marriage with Lady Vittoria, albeit I am sure that your Illustrious Eminence, as one who has knowledge of the real truth, would never allow himself to credit anything of the kind, I desire nevertheless that for the greater peace of your soul you shall not believe any such absurdity, and do confirm to you that the said lady is not my wife, nor could she be so inasmuch that the will of Our Lord (the Pope) is that no marriage shall be contracted between her and me, nor do I forget the declaration and the promise contained in those letters which I dispatched to the Catholic King (Philip), to his Highness the Grand Duke (Francesco) and to your Illustrious Self. Wherefore, rest absolutely assured that these rumours are both false and malicious, and, seeing that your Eminence knows me so well, I will add nothing more except an assur-

ance that I am your Eminence's sincere and most affectionate servant, and in all reverence I kiss your Eminence's hands.

From Bracciano, the last of January, 1584,

Your Illustrious Eminence's most affectionate servant and cousin,

PAOLO GIORDANO ORSINI.

Ferdinando was busy with the arrangements for a magnificent entertainment which he proposed to give at his villa. The climax was to have come when a lion gave battle to a bull; but unfortunately the lion ran away into a corner at the first touch of the bull's horns, and the dogs had to be called upon before the bull could be finished off. This fiasco must have been the more galling to Ferdinando because his guests included four important Cardinals and the famous Clelia, daughter of Cardinal Farnese, who had been called "the nest of Venus and all the little 'loves.'" Indeed, people were saying that Cardinal Farnese had "created three marvellous objects—his palace, the Church of Jesus, and his daughter Clelia".[1]

[1] Quoted by Montaigne.

CHAPTER XII
Vittoria Meets Her Murderer

WE shall never know how much, if at all, Vittoria really loved the Duke. Some readers may think that we have already had enough evidence to suggest that she acted mainly from self-interest. Without the support of the Duke she would have been socially insignificant, and she would have been desperately poor. Moreover, the Duke had now swollen to such a monstrous extent that he had special permission not to kneel when he came into the presence of the Holy Father. And now, too, his health had become extremely bad. He suffered almost incessantly from a deep ulcer in one of his legs, and even the application of poultices made of raw meat hardly diminished the pain. Nevertheless, women have often loved strange and unwholesome men. They may also love at the same time a man's money and the man himself: and although she had everything to lose by abandoning the Duke, we ought not to assume that she did not care for him at all.

Life at the castle of Bracciano was now reinvigorated by the arrival of the Duke's old companion-in-arms, Marcantonio Colonna. The great man, who was Vice-

roy of Sicily, brought with him four hundred retainers with whom he stayed in the castle for eleven days. It is said[1] that sixteen long tables were kept furnished with food and drink both by day and by night, a notable intimation of Paolo Giordano's wealth and hospitality; but the Duke himself was rarely able to be present at these vast feasts. Thirty-six persons ate at each meal, an arrangement which must have kept the servants genuinely busy.[2] Colonna, strangely enough, has been more honoured by posterity than he was by his contemporaries. Gnoli says of him: "Favoured by good luck, which was to him as a hare is to a lion, he developed an immoderate vanity. As Viceroy of Sicily he damaged the island by his bad government and by arrogating to himself more power than he could rightly claim. Among his other iniquities was the killing of Baron Cantaranio Corberio for the sake of peacefully enjoying the Baron's wife, Eufrosina. (The widow, we hear, almost certainly connived at the murder.) Although he was nothing but a servant of Spain, he was so blinded by his own importance that he would not even accord a naval salute to Doria, and certainly the foreign King (Philip of Spain) ought to have rebuked him for this insult to the Italian Admiral." From the *Rome News* we get, as so often, a surprisingly outspoken

[1] By Ferrante in *Rose del Mondo*.
[2] Brigante Colonna.

verdict. On June the 13th, 1584, the *News* remarked that "The King, instigated not only by the criticism (*invidia*) of his court but also by the woeful complaints of the Sicilians, called him back to Spain: and, on his way through Rome, his ridiculous arrogance made everybody laugh at him, for he was more pompously Spanish than any Spaniard could be. The Romans, moreover, ridiculed his affected costume, suitable only to a juvenile amorist, as he went about perfumed, tricked out, with a figured cap, beardless, flowered ruffles, jewelled buttons in his collar and cloak, gold and white shoes, and all this without bearing in mind that he was born in 1533."[1] The Romans, indeed, said that in womanish self-adornment he bore the palm from everyone.

The Duke, still struggling between passion and a desire of respectability, concealed Vittoria from the very first moment that he heard of Colonna's approach; but, although it seems incredible, she does not appear to have resented at first her imprisonment in a "secret room". Colonna's namesake, the modern biographer, suggests that Paolo's constant worry about Vittoria may have exacerbated his illness. He was certainly in so bad a condition that Cardinal d'Este sent his personal surgeon —"although with very little hope", as the *Rome News* tells us, "of doing any good to a fistula in a body so

[1] He was therefore an old gentleman of about forty-eight.

enormous". Let us record, in passing, that Cardinal d'Este had always shown himself a staunch friend, and had even approved of Paolo's love for Vittoria. Moreover, on the night of July the 3rd, Cardinal Ferdinando's own phlebotomist arrived at the castle, with orders to do his best. Throughout the Bracciano demesne prayers were said and bells were rung for the Duke's leg: and the *Rome News*, which must have caused intense irritation among the great persons of Italy, reported that the fistula, "having become weary of wandering about in so vast an area without being able to come to a head, seems at last to have abandoned the enterprise". On September the 20th, Cardinal d'Este's surgeon, after making a fresh examination, affirmed that no amputation was necessary and that the trouble had definitely abated. He seems to have been right, for in November of that year the unhappy Duke began once more to visit Rome. Meanwhile, Marcantonio Colonna, soon after leaving Bracciano, had (says the *News*) gone to Civitavecchia and then, at Medina, died very suddenly, "nor were there many who mourned him". Poisoning was, as usual, suspected.

So good a friend was Cardinal d'Este that, whatever we may feel about the matter, he now took the trouble to obtain absolution for Marcello Accoramboni in respect of two murders. This meant that the vile creature who had pandered his lovely sister would be

able thenceforth to visit Rome without fear of arrest. The two murdered men, in this instance, were Pallavicino and Peretti. Each of them had been related to a Cardinal. And what did the hermit-like Cardinal Montalto feel when he heard that Pope Gregory had absolved Marcello of the second murder? He continued to say nothing and to lie low: but we shall see, in due time, how little Marcello profited by this temporary good fortune.

At this moment Lodovico Orsini reappears in the story. Like most of the men who figure prominently in it, Lodovico had committed acts of violence which made his continued residence in Rome precarious: he was involved in the murder of the innocent Vitelli: and, a junior scion of a great family, he had to earn his living. He had now, therefore, decided to offer his services to the Venetian Republic, and to that end had sent his confidential satellite, Francesco Filelfo da Tolentino (whom we shall know henceforth as Filelfo), to find out whether the Venetians had any post to offer him. Filelfo, who had been at one time in the service of Cardinal Montalto, was accustomed to dealing with important persons and was, by all accounts, an expert negotiator, a loyal servant and, by the standard of the age, a good and honest man. His embassy was so successful that he persuaded the Council of Ten to give his master the rank of Colonel with an annual

salary of a thousand, or (as some say) twelve hundred, scudi.

Lodovico, therefore, had come to say goodbye to the head of his clan: and he was able to assure Paolo that he had obtained a safe-conduct from the chief of the Rome police, the Duke of Sora—more familiar to us as the beloved son of Pope Gregory. Almost at once Lodovico ran into the abominable Marcello, with whom at one time he had been on terms of boon-companionship. He was too well versed in the intrigues of the age to show how his liking for Marcello had now turned into bitter hatred: but, with his fantastic pride in the Orsini, it was not possible that he should continue to like Vittoria's brother. In his view, Paolo ought to have said to Vittoria:

> Thou hast led me, like a beast of sacrifice,
> With music and with yokes of yellow flowers,
> To my eternal ruin,

and it was wormwood to him that Vittoria should still be queening it in the castle. Nevertheless, he controlled his anger and disgust, and succeeded not only in behaving toward her with the utmost politeness but also in obtaining from the hard-pressed Duke a large sum of money with which to begin his Venetian career in a style befitting one of the Orsini. This, in fact, was his first meeting with the marvellous *femme fatale* of whom he had heard so much, whose thread of life he was

destined to break, and because of whom he was himself to die a shameful death. We shall find that this high-tempered soul was too orgulous to live nobly but that he certainly managed to die well. It is something that so arrogant and unlovable a man did not quail when, together with the faithful Filelfo, he himself was cornered.

CHAPTER XIII

The Importance Of Being Married

A READER who has any sympathy with feminine psychology, or the *mouvements d'âme* of a woman, will have suspected that Vittoria soon began to resent her seclusion during the visit of the half-heroic and half-ludicrous Marcantonio Colonna. For one thing, she would certainly have been curious to see so famous a man. For another, she considered herself to be the true Duchess of Bracciano; and, if Paolo accepted that assumption when they were "alone", she must have been furious with him for not daring to acknowledge her when his old and important friends paid a visit to the castle. We cannot have any doubt that his action, typical of a conscience-ridden male, rankled in her mind, or that there were difficult conversations and "scenes" between the Duke and his paramour or half-wife: and all that the distracted Paolo could oppose to her expressions of injured self-esteem was the solid fact that he had tried, over and over again, to regularize their relationship. Agitated by her recriminations, he probably implored her to comprehend that the Pope, not he himself, was responsible for her undignified

seclusion. Some men may pity the luckless and blundering Paolo.

As usual, she succeeded. She taunted him with not being a true Orsini. This would have stung him. A true Orsini would send the whole world to the devil rather than humiliate his wife: yes, and even although Pope Gregory would not acknowledge their marriage, did not the Pope refuse his blessing merely because he dared not irritate those Medici at Florence? And had not Paolo reiterated that she was no paramour but an honourable wife, and a real Duchess? What was the value of all his protestations if he did not live up to them? Was she always to be hidden away when his most interesting friends came to see him? It is a situation which no man ought to expect his wife, or even his paramour, to put up with.

Accordingly, in December, 1584, Vittoria, with the Duke in tow, went to Rome, in all the magnificence of coaches and luggage-wagons. No sooner had the famous Vittoria come there than Roman "society" flocked to her salon. And then, with the audacity or effrontery of a simple soul, the Duke decided that he and Vittoria ought to pay their respects to Cardinal Montalto. It is true that the Duke had arranged the murder of Peretti, the Cardinal's nephew; but at present the murder had not been brought home to him,

and in Paolo's mind, wherein the murder figured as a tiresome necessity which he had already half-forgotten, Cardinal Montalto was not supposed to know that he had had any connection with that lamentable event. Paolo had, it is true, engineered the killing of Peretti, but, after all, these murders of convenience were frequently performed; and, moreover, it had happened some time ago, and why should a great man be bothered by something which he did long ago and in half a dream? He went to call upon Cardinal Montalto in his customary mood of *bonhomie*. Vittoria, too, seeing that the Cardinal had adopted so Christian an attitude toward the murder of her husband, probably assumed that she would be *persona grata*. They were mightily mistaken, but the Cardinal continued to play his self-appointed part.

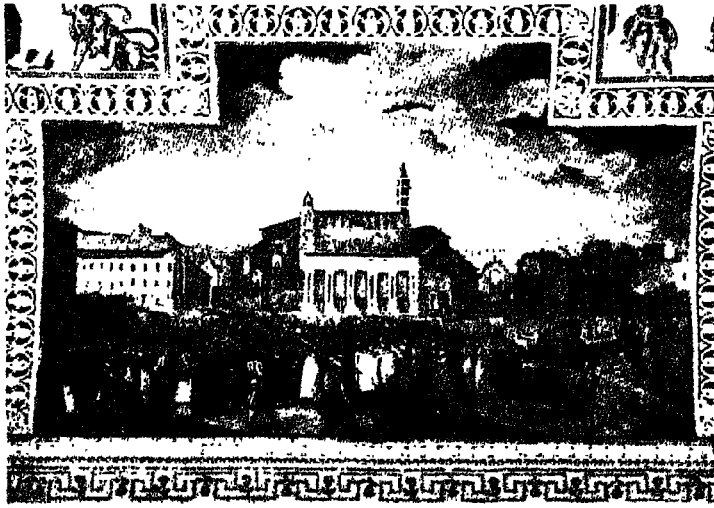
According to the *Rome News*, issued on January the 12th, 1585, "The aforesaid gentleman and lady paid a visit, the other day, to Cardinal Montalto, who appeared to receive them with a show of great pleasure. Indeed, he accepted them into his presence with brotherly tenderness, kissing them again and again: and assuring them, with his hand to his heart, of his belief that they were as wholly innocent in the matter of his nephew's murder as of desiring his own death (and what a fantastic and incredible notion that would be!) even although there were ridiculous persons who took



Alinari

POPE SIXTUS V

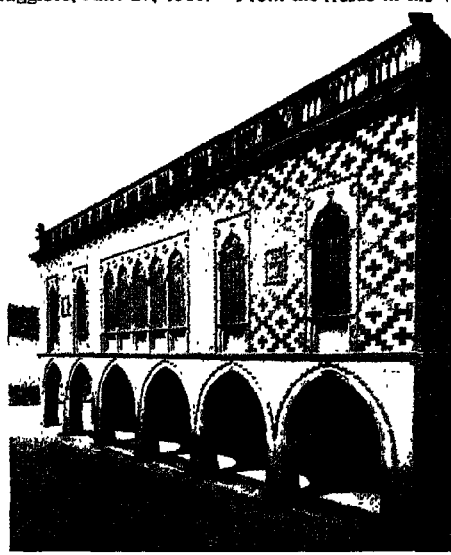
From the painting in the Vatican Gallery



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THE FUNERAL OF FRANCESCO PERETTI

The murdered man's body being taken in solemn procession to the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, June 27, 1588. From the fresco in the Vatican Library



Alinari

a different point of view. . . ." We must assume that Montalto's behaviour deceived the lovers, but they knew well enough that the Pope, the King of Spain, the Spanish Ambassador and the Medici brothers were still opposed to them.

However, Paolo managed to get himself invited by Ferdinando, the Medici Cardinal, to Cerveteri, where they spent some days in hunting. They are, in fact, reported to have returned to Rome with the corpses of twenty boars, thirty-four goats and a thousand brace of birds. That, in itself, must have gratified Paolo, but the important part of the expedition consisted in his conversation about Vittoria. So amiably did Ferdinando speak of her that Paolo, eager to strike while the iron was hot, invited the Cardinal to a hunt on the shores of the lake at Bracciano ; and the Cardinal, before going home from it, actually promised to intervene with the Pope and to see if the marriage might at last be regularized. He went so far as to make an appointment with the most suitable intermediary at the Vatican ; and no one can guess what the upshot might have been if only Paolo Giordano, who ought to have learnt his lesson, could for once have restrained his jubilation and impetuosity. On the contrary, he hurried to the Bishop of Sutri-and-Nepi, in the diocese of Bracciano, and suggested that the complacent Bishop should write at once to his Holiness. He may, in

fact, have dictated the letter, part of which runs as follows:

> Signor Paolo, fearing that you may have formed an unfavourable opinion of himself and of his protestations, on the ground that he is not living in good Christian matrimony, has instructed me to notify your Blessedness that in the month of October, 1583, after your Holiness had removed the impediments previously in existence, he married Signora Vittoria Coramboni.
>
> He has kept this marriage quiet until this moment in order to avoid various inconveniences, but he now makes a clean breast of it because of the great zeal with which he regards your Holiness to whom he will always be obedient and whom he will serve in perpetuity, living as a good Christian. . . .
>
> The Duke expressly commands me not to mention his marriage to anyone except the Pope, as he has not the heart to give this news to the Medici to whom he had openly admitted that it was not true. . . .

When, therefore, Ferdinando began his interview with the representative of the Vatican by saying that he wanted to speak about Signora Vittoria, his colleague smiled and replied that he already knew that Paolo had written to the Pope. Indeed, the Pope had commanded him to acquaint his Excellency the Cardinal de' Medici with Paolo Giordano's impudent statement. Moreover,

his Holiness had riposted by issuing a ban even more severe than any which had preceded it.

Ferdinando, who had sincerely intended to do his best for Paolo in a very ticklish affair, thus found that the Duke had forestalled him and had, in fact, made him look foolish. It goes without saying that he was angry, but the anger of this icy man was mild by comparison with the fury of the Pope. Ferdinando contented himself with writing a very taunting letter to the errant Duke, but Gregory proceeded at once to investigate the marriage dossier and to interrogate a number of local priests. The Duke, at his wits' end, wrote to Ferdinando, saying:

> Now that it is done—done solely that I might be able to live in a Christian manner—I beg your Illustrious Reverence in the name of Our Lord to give it your most sacred blessing; and if we did wrong, not in our own judgement but in that of your Reverence, I entreat you most humbly and by the wounds of our Lord that you will pardon us.

The next result of his rashness was that a small committee of eminent churchmen reported that all the evidence lay against the Duke. They even suspected that Vittoria had consented to the murder of Peretti. Paolo, foreseeing the effect of this report upon the Pope and guessing that his Holiness would fine him heavily, strove wildly to melt the hearts of the Medici, his kins-

men by marriage but, of course, the uncles of his boy Virginio, and therefore the persons least likely of all to assist the interloping Vittoria. He implores Ferdinando "to get the matter suspended because, if it goes through any further, it must mean my ruin and the disapprobation of other persons, and I cannot believe that my ruin would give any pleasure to your Illustrious Reverence." He added, characteristically, that he might pay a visit to Rome. Ferdinando told him firmly that he must do nothing of the kind. "If", he said, "I am to be of any help to you, delay is the only hope."

Once again Paolo attempted to break with Vittoria, nor do we know how she felt about it. Perhaps she had realized by this time that he was unable to get free; and perhaps he assured her that he was making this gesture merely in order to gain time. Indeed, this may have been the truth. At least he wrote to Ferdinando, assuring the Cardinal that the long enchantment was dispelled at last; and Ferdinando, probably disposed to think that any man could easily dispense with a lover, certainly busied himself in Paolo's behalf. He contrived, in a word, that Gregory should not do anything drastic for the present: and, after all, it may be that the Cardinal had a genuine liking for the wild-hearted, conscience-stricken Duke. The delay might have effected little if death had not been hovering over the aged Pope. Moreover, during this lull in the Duke's unhappy affairs,

Pope Gregory happened to be side-tracked by a most unusual event.

Some years earlier (in 1562), during the pontificate of Pius the Fourth, a Russian embassy had arrived at the Vatican, having for its purpose the deliverance of the Czar's thanks for the Pope's intervention as between Russia on the one part and Sweden and Poland on the other. The Russians, completely at sea in a Western court, had behaved somewhat oddly, not understanding, for example, the formality of genuflecting before his Holiness. The Pope had presented to the Russian envoys a number of gold-inwoven clothes which the Russians, to the scandal of all Rome, had instantly tried to sell—in order to pay for their long journey homeward. These Russians, however, must have seemed almost human by comparison with the embassy of Japanese which now, at the beginning of 1585, arrived in Rome. Let us see how Brigante Colonna describes their visit. "The embassy from Japan," he writes, "led by Father Alessandro Valegnano, a Jesuit missionary (*visitatore*), did much better (i.e. than the Russians). The embassy was composed of three youths, none of them more than twenty years of age, who in order to get to Rome had been travelling for three years. They represented the kings of Bungo, Arima and Omura. And they behaved so reverently and with so much grace that Pasquino (a famous lampoonist of the time) sus-

pected them of being three Jesuits, masquerading as disguised secret-agents."

First of all, the great Cardinal Farnese received them in his palace. All Rome turned out in their honour, or to see them. When the three young Japanese were ready to visit the Pope, they rode from Farnese's palace to the Vatican upon three white mules, caparisoned in black velvet garnished with gold. The very costumes of the three Orientals astonished the Romans.

So well had everything been arranged that when these Japanese boys arrived within bow-shot of the Vatican, they were greeted by a salute of artillery from the Castle of Saint Angelo. They met Pope Gregory on April the 10th, 1585. At this time Japan must have seemed, at Rome, almost as remote as Mars: and that, no doubt, is why Gregory supposed that this little embassy intimated that all Asia had suddenly recognized the truth of the Christian revelation. Gregory was happy at last. At last the whole world, including even the remotest Asiatics, had acknowledged that truth was a perquisite of the Roman branch of Christianity. "Nunc, Domine," murmured Gregory, "dimitte servum tuum." He did really believe that the whole of humanity had at length accepted the truth as expounded by the Roman Church. To him these three Japanese represented all Asia.

Five days after he had received them, Gregory died—

suffocated by his asthma; and although we can say that he had been a fairly virtuous man, we must admit that he was a sadly weak pontiff.

His death, of course, completely altered the situation for Paolo and Vittoria. Nobody knew for certain which Cardinal would be elected to the Papacy, but it was generally assumed that Cardinal Farnese was the coming man. If he were elected he would probably take a more lenient view of this famous love-affair than that which Gregory had taken, for he was much more a man of the world. We know at least that Paolo, realizing that for some time the entire city would be too greatly preoccupied with the election to trouble itself about his private affairs, decided to marry Vittoria yet again. To this end he secured the services of a Spanish priest, Don Bartolomeo Olalla de Roijas, who in the course of celebrating Mass turned to his congregation and said: "For the first time, let all whom the matter concerns now know that the excellent Signor Paolo Giordano Orsini desires to contract a marriage with Signora Vittoria Accorambona: wherefore you are all exhorted, in accordance with the forms laid down by the holy Council of Trent, that if any among you knows of any impediment to this marriage, he must declare it." So eager was Paolo to effect the marriage, and so helpful was his Spanish priest, that the latter, losing no time, published the banns a second and a

third time as quickly as the resolutions of the Council of Trent made possible. On the day appointed for this final remarriage, Don Bartolomeo was a busy man. He had to begin it by burying one of the Duke's oldest retainers, who had been shot the day before; and then, "leaving the dead for the living", he joined the necessary lawyer, and the pair of them gave religious and legal sanction to the interchange of vows between Paolo and Vittoria. The Abbot Mario, Vittoria's brother, was among those present. And then, very naturally, the whole company returned to the castle and there was a mighty junketing. The lovers imagined that at last they were truly married, and safe from all further interference.

CHAPTER XIV

Electing The New Pope

IN the sixteenth century there were few events more important or more exciting than the election of a new Pope. As a temporal potentate, he was one of the most formidable persons in Italy; and as Head of the Universal Church, he was spiritual lord over a great part of mankind. Moreover, the destiny of several hundreds of men and women depended very largely upon his temperament and character.

Accustomed as we are to a quiet election, duly announced in the newspapers, we should be amazed if we could see what happened at such a time three and a half centuries ago. All Rome, conscious that for a few weeks there would be no ultimate controller of the city, ran wild. Now was the time, for example, to carry out that family vendetta, to contrive a profitable murder or to burgle fearlessly. So was it during the April of 1585. The mob was able even to break open the doors of the city prisons; and on this occasion a large number of prisoners unexpectedly found themselves at liberty and once more at supper with their rascally confederates. Among these prisoners there were, in fact, thirty-six

who were due to be hanged before Easter—an extremely narrow escape.

Moreover, it was customary for the new Pope to allow the mob to pillage his palace. No doubt, a Cardinal who seemed likely to obtain the Papacy cleared his palace of everything which he most valued. Everyone now, as we have seen, confidently anticipated the election of Cardinal Farnese, and the mob, misled by a rumour, sacked his great mansion.

Farnese was, in fact, chosen to be President of the Conclave; and at the same time the Duke of Sora (Gregory's son) was informed that he was still to act as Governor of Rome. Now, so dangerous to the peace of the city was Lodovico Orsini that one of Cardinal Farnese's first actions was to ask the Venetian Republic not to let Lodovico visit Rome. "Both by heredity and ancient custom", said a contemporary, "this family of the Orsini was accustomed to arms, headlong in its emotions and ready to pick a quarrel upon the smallest pretext." It is not, therefore, surprising that on April the 10th the Venetian Ambassador at Rome should have written to the Doge, his master: "The illustrious Farnese, whom I called upon yesterday, begs me in his own name and in the name of the whole College of Cardinals to ask your Serenity, for the peace of the Papal State, to see that Signor Lodovico Orsini shall not come here at present but rather, by finding him

some occupation elsewhere, to make sure that his arrival in Rome shall not be followed by some scandal." The Ambassador ends his letter by stating that within forty-eight hours of Gregory's death there had been "some private murders, but not to the extent which is usual in a time when the Throne is vacant". Lodovico, we must remember, had owned to the murder of Vitelli; and both Farnese and the Venetian Ambassador were quite aware that the Vitelli clan was eager to be avenged. Lodovico, however, was not to be so easily thwarted. He may have cared for God, but not a rap for man or the devil.

The Venetian Republic, although recognizing the valour of their Colonel Lodovico, was so uncertain of the man's behaviour that, instead of giving him a long engagement, it renewed his colonelcy month by month; and indeed Lodovico was at times so high-handed that even his secretary, the faithful Filelfo, had to point out to him that Venice was a city ruled by law and not by force. Nevertheless, the turbulent Lodovico's body-guard was frequently clashing with the servants of other notabilities—very much as "the Three Musketeers" are so often involved in skirmishes with Cardinal Richelieu's men: and, after all, it was natural that young fellows who daily practised with arquebus or rapier should not be satisfied to rehearse for ever. Just at this moment three of Lodovico's gentlemen desired to get

into the house of a courtesan at Murano: and, having succeeded, they promptly murdered the girl's "protector". When the populace rose up in its wrath, the three young men took refuge in the cemetery, where they remained in a state of siege. The news was brought instantly to Lodovico, who, as we might expect, wished to take punitive measures at once. Instead, however, of doing anything so rash, he decided to send Filelfo to the Venetian Government. The Government, through a representative named Patavino, apprehended the three delinquents (who were soon set free, with a stipulation that they might not stay in Venice or Murano); and Patavino then took the opportunity to say to Filelfo, "Tell your illustrious Signor Lodovico that this city is ruled by religion and law, and that he had better restrain his household and, moreover, that our State does not relish happenings of this kind and is accustomed to remedy wrongs and to chastise evil-doers, not excepting the person finally responsible."

Fortunately for Lodovico, the letter from Rome, desiring the Doge not to let him come there, arrived too late. The news of the Pope's death had already been brought; and Lodovico had instantly asked the Government to grant him leave—"so that", he said, "I may put my affairs in order"—and the Government had told him that he might do so. The Venetians thought that, having already granted leave to him, they would lose

face if they rescinded it. However, Rome was a danger-spot for Lodovico, and that is why he sent Filelfo three days ahead of himself, with instructions to assure the Romans of his "good intentions" and that he had "no desire to stir up trouble".

Paolo Giordano, having now married Vittoria as much as it was possible to marry her, decided that it would be a wise move to visit the Pope elect (as he assumed)—Cardinal Farnese: and this was made simple because, according to custom, the College of Cardinals, with Farnese as principal host, held what we might call a party to which all the foreign ambassadors and all the great men of Italy were invited. It was a formal party, and in due course Paolo had to state whether he had come to it with any particular purpose. Paolo, as usual, protested his filial obedience to the Church: and then Farnese, rising from his chair, dismayed the simple Duke by asking whether he was prepared to rid his castle of all those brigands—yes, and, in particular, whether he would surrender Marcello Accoramboni to justice. Otherwise, said Farnese, Paolo himself would be punished alike in person and in property. Paolo, protesting his constant obedience to the wishes of the Church, bowed and left the party. He was probably relieved that Farnese had rebuked him about his bandits rather than about his mistress. Marcello, however, seeing that if his employer were to

surrender him he would be sent to the galleys, disappeared from Rome abruptly and took shelter in the Bracciano castle. It is quite evident that the Duke had not the least intention of losing the services of Vittoria's lickspittle brother or of disbanding his brigands. We have the evidence of a letter which Marcello wrote to him on April the 17th, 1585—the anniversary of Peretti's death.

Most illustrious, excellent and eternal Master,

I have not reported to your Excellency about what happened between Moricone and Antonio because I instructed Signor Flaminio[1] to inform you of the matter.

No sooner had I arrived than I went to various places where the bandits were, as your Excellency had ordered me to do. This morning Tasso, Acitello and Luchitto turned up here, together with ten most charming companions, desiring to know what I wished them to do. I said, in the name of your Excellency, that I wanted them to remain within your demesne where they would both do well and be secure. They replied that they were ready to do anything but that they would prefer to make the arrangement through Marianaccio, who no doubt would be willing to fall in with any of my requirements, and on that understanding they left, intending to return.

[1] Flaminio Accoramboni—Vittoria's favourite brother.

I sent Sacripante and "Death", with a good many others, to summon them, and I fancy that they will return here without sending any further reply. Checco da Fabriano, Fabritio della Ripa and Count Lionello are at present with the Duke of Urbino. If your Excellency wishes that I should send for them, and all three are ready at any minute, I will inform them, and I am sure that they will come. I also know that Antonello and that man from Capranicha are somewhere near Stubbia, and that they will come back to Bracciano if your Excellency wants them.

It is desirable that your Excellency should appoint some rendezvous at which these men may assemble, one by one, for I am confident that they will come, and should instruct me as to what I ought now to do. I shall always serve you in all humility and affection, and most reverently do I kiss your hand.

Your servant,

MARCELLO A.

All Rome, meanwhile, was awaiting the decision of the Cardinals, "just", says Brigante Colonna, "as people wait for the turning of a wheel in a lottery." If the "right" Pope were chosen, thousands of men and women would better their condition: if the new Pope was not favourable to them, these same men and women would have to hope for better luck at the next turn of the collegiate wheel. In Florence, we learn, betting on the eligible Cardinals had begun so

long ago as the previous January: and there were twenty-two Cardinals who were seriously considered. "Farnese" (I quote Colonna) "stood at eighteen-and-a-half scudi"—he was, in short, easily the favourite; "Savelli at eleven-and-a-half; Paleotto at eight; Albani at seven-and-a-half; Santacroce and Montalto at six-and-a-half: but now, after the death of Gregory, the odds had altered and Montalto had gone ahead of Savelli, Albani and even Farnese. Then, suddenly, Farnese took the lead of both Savelli and Montalto." This betting upon the identity of the next Pope may seem to us odd and irreverent, but we must remember that Italians, like Australians, are always eager to gamble on any matter. The *Rome News* commented that "The Court is only too ready to proceed against those who, despite the Bull which forbids anything of the kind, are making bets upon the Cardinals who might conceivably obtain the Papacy: but the merchants have so many connections with their correspondents in Venice, Florence and Naples that it is not possible to suppress them."

It is from the same impudent source that we learn how Cardinal Farnese "is inflamed with a mad and almost incredible desire of becoming the Pope". Farnese was indeed "the favourite"; but the Medici brothers wanted a Pope who should be strongly French in his politics and, for this reason, supported the claim

of Cardinal d'Este; while, at the same time, the Spanish Ambassador was lobbying for all he was worth in behalf of a candidate who should put the interests of Spain at the top of his programme. The reader will be sure, no doubt, that whenever Cardinal Montalto seemed to be advancing, the Duke of Bracciano lobbied strenuously against him; for if Montalto were to be elected, there might—conceivably—be still more trouble for these ill-starred lovers. True, Montalto had "retired from life" to such a degree that most of the other Cardinals thought of him as an agèd and extinct volcano. They assumed, in fact, that he would be a safe man. This worn-out Cardinal, they calculated, should be easily influenced, and it is because they made this assumption that he came into the running at all. Nevertheless, according to the Venetian Ambassador, Paolo had gone down upon his knees (a physical gesture of which he was quite incapable) to Cardinal after Cardinal, begging them not to elect Montalto.

The old peasant himself, seeing—perhaps with surprise—that he really had some chance of occupying Saint Peter's chair, pertinaciously lobbied in his own behalf. Assuming a milk-and-water aspect, he too went the round of the Cardinals, making himself especially engaging to Cardinal d'Este, to the German Cardinal Altemps, and to our old acquaintance—Ferdinando de' Medici. As for his own vote, he assured everybody

that he meant to give it to Farnese. Ferdinando was obviously suspended upon the horns of a dilemma. Should he please Montalto or Paolo Giordano?

On April the 21st, 1585, the Cardinals met in Conclave, and having deliberated until the evening, recorded their votes. Among the forty-two Cardinals who turned up (some members of the College, which numbered sixty, may, in those times, have found a journey to Rome impracticable) there were three Germans, three Frenchmen and a single Spaniard. Cardinal Montalto did, of course, attend this crucial meeting; but it seemed to be obvious that age had withered him and that he was almost bent double by "stone".

An enormous crowd watched for the little puff of smoke which would signal that a new Pope had been elected, and it was Ferdinando de' Medici who announced the result. Carrying a great cross, he said, "Nuntio vobis gaudium magnum", with the rest of the traditional words: "I bring you great news: that we have as our Pope the illustrious and most reverend Cardinal of Montalto, who names himself Sixtus the Fifth." All the Cardinals, we hear, with the exception of himself, had voted for Montalto. He had voted for Farnese. Montalto had seemed to his fellows a poor and ailing old man, easily to be swayed. A certain Cardinal, for instance, immediately asked another—

Bonelli—to beg the new Pope for a particular benefice; and Bonelli replied, "Don't let us bother the poor old man about it because, obviously, we shall be in control ourselves." They were soon to learn how much the "poor old man" had misled them by his consummate acting.

The *Rome News*, obviously with some dissatisfaction, comments: "Cardinal Montalto did not move a hair when he was acclaimed Pope, although most of his predecessors have wept tenderly on such occasions: but if his Holiness was outwardly unmoved, he may have wept inward tears. His palace was not sacked, as would have been customary; the artillery at the Castle of Saint Angelo gave him no salute; and the church bells of the city were as silent as they are on Good Friday."

A man, writing up the parish registers of Bracciano, made an entry concerning the marriage of Paolo Giordano and Vittoria, and added, in Latin, "and only one hour after this marriage, Pope Sixtus the Fifth was elected": ominous words.

CHAPTER XV

Brigands, Lovers And Prostitutes

THE story went that no sooner had Montalto decided to be called Sixtus the Fifth than he ceased to be racked by his asthmatic cough, ceased to show any symptoms of stone, threw away his crutches, lifted his hands toward heaven and intoned the Te Deum with a volume of voice which astounded and dismayed the Cardinals. The vivid dream of his humble parents had come true at last. Pastor describes him in these words: "The son of the poor villagers in Grottammare was sixty-five when he assumed the highest honour which can come to a human being. His appearance indicated a man of action and of strong will, but at the same time it revealed his rustic origin. He was of medium height, of robust build, and thoroughly unattractive. His head was large and somewhat pushed forward, and his beard was thick and of a dark auburn mixed with grey. His cheekbones protruded, his nose was big and heavy, his high forehead was deeply corrugated, and his arched eyebrows, extraordinarily bushy, almost hid his small and burning eyes. He had, moreover, so piercing a glance that in consistory a single look was quite suffi-

cient to cow the Cardinals. His lips, firmly compressed into a thin line, showed his energy and his indomitable will: and his good health was manifested by his florid complexion."

Seemingly mild men are even now occasionally asked to become chairmen of committees, and sometimes with startling results. The effect of choosing Montalto as Head of the Catholic Church was amazing. "Under Gregory", says the *Rome News*, "three Cardinals died per annum, but now the rate is at one Cardinal a month." Pasquino, the free-lance lampoonist of that day, remarked that the new Pope had "turned Rome into a convent": to which, as Brigante Colonna says, the Pope might have answered, "I am the State". He was, in fact, a dictator of the type with which we are so familiar in our own period.

To begin with, he believed in centralization, and he thought of the Church as an absolute monarchy of the whole world. Next, he made it quite clear to his Cardinals that they were merely instruments for putting his will into effect. Then, like any modern dictator, he suppressed all traditional liberties. When the Commune of Rome dared to protest, he replied that all their "rights" had been granted by the benevolence of earlier Popes, and that if they did not toe the new line, he would take away from them even that which they had.

His next move was to cut down the police force and

to reduce the pay of those who were graciously permitted to remain in it. On July the 15th he turned his attention to the brigands who had terrorized the Roman State, and all Italy, for so many years. In fact, he issued a Bull by means of which he hoped to exterminate the pest. Every nobleman, every commune and every responsible person in small villages was required to round up the brigands; and if they had not sufficient forces to do this (a dangerous undertaking) they were to apply for help from the nearest city. His war against the brigands was so successful that corpse after corpse, day after day, was strung up as a warning to the public: and when the city council of Rome begged his Holiness to rid their city of the sight and the stench of these dead bodies, he glared at them from under those beetling brows and dispatched them with the words, "Your noses are too sensitive. If dead men stink in your nostrils, evil-living men stink in Ours, and particularly the so-called 'great'. If you find the air here offensive, go and seek better air somewhere else."

The police, electrified into action, even insisted upon searching for brigands in the palaces of the Cardinals, not always without success. Everybody, in fact, had now very seriously to consider his p's and q's, or this terrifying Holy Father would pounce upon him. On August the 14th the *Rome News* declared that "the actual payment of rewards, which used to be promised but

not paid, has meant that new brigands' heads are brought every day; and last Sunday we were furnished with the heads of 'Death', the notorious brigand, Petrino d'Agubio (another of Marcello's flock) and Ricciotto del Bosca. . . ." Three days later we hear that "this morning Captain Cecca da Fabriano, who with his associates murdered Signor Vincenzo Vitelli, was publicly torn with red-hot pincers, hanged and quartered: and to-day four further heads have been brought in". Again, "Cardinal Colonna has set up twelve gibbets between Anagni and Frosolone, and every one of them is now occupied by a disembowelled brigand". Indeed, Cardinal after Cardinal strove to prove his zeal by stringing up these public pests; and when Cardinal Gesualdo showed some tendency to slack off, Sixtus gave him such a dressing-down that he went away and hanged twenty-five of the rascals. The authorities in Bologna, Perugia and the Campagna indulged heartily in this brigand-hunting. In fact, the only person of importance who refrained from it was Cardinal Farnese, who sent his secretary to the Vatican with an excuse for not sending any heads. There was, indeed, old Count Giovanni Pepoli, of Bologna, who, being required to hand over a notorious brigand, had the courage to refuse—on the ground that this brigand, whose work had been done in the Empire, was not within the jurisdiction of the Holy See. The Pope's representative

thereupon arrested the old Count; and while awaiting sentence, the Count managed to send out letters in which he implored certain friends to save him from "this tyrannical friar". The letters were intercepted. Sixtus observed "there is one law for all men"; and Count Pepoli was strangled. The body of the old man was hanged up, between four flaming torches, in the sacristy of San Petronio; but the weeping processions of those who went to view it, and who had loved the Count, cannot have pleased the Pope. Again and again does the *Rome News* inform us of brigands who have been captured and set swinging. Hardly an issue appeared without a report that four, eight or "many" had been rounded up. The most famous heads were exhibited at the most conspicuous places; as, for example, the head of Guercino and that of Andreatino, who had called himself "King of the Marshes and the Mountains". Curcieto da Sambuci, being transported to Rome by sea, jumped overboard, but his body was recovered and duly decapitated. Attilio Blaschi had the bad luck to be arrested and hanged for a crime which he had committed thirty-six years earlier: and as for the Duke of Urbino, he decided to have his brigands poisoned.

No one could have expected that Sixtus, presumably a virgin, would pay no attention to sexual misdemeanours. There was, for example, the ancient Lelio Massimi, who

was attached to the Vatican. He had secretly married the lovely Eufrosina, ex-mistress of Marcantonio Colonna and still a widow. When Lelio's four sons, who lived in Flanders, heard the news, they hurried home, asked for an audience with their stepmother, immediately shot her, and then escaped back to Flanders. Old Lelio, hearing the news while he was at the Vatican, publicly cursed them: but when the news came to Sixtus, he was so angry that, not being able to lay hold of the sons, he threw old Lelio into the prison at the Castle of Saint Angelo. Here the ancient sinner (who had, after all, married Eufrosina) languished for many months until at last, by offering a large ransom, he was permitted to die in one of his remotest properties. On the very next night after the murder of Eufrosina—so little can men and women control their sexual impulse—a beautiful lady's-maid was seduced by a young gentleman who, in order to come to her, had climbed through the bedroom window. Unfortunately the young gentleman happened to be Roberto Gallese, son of Cardinal Altemps, and only a few days earlier he had changed his marquisate for a dukedom. Sixtus ordered Cardinal Altemps to go in person with the delinquent and to see him bestowed in the Castle of Saint Angelo. Altemps hesitated. Then he decided to obey. Lastly he shrank back again, remembering the crimes which might be levelled against the boy. Accord-

ing to the *Rome News*, Gallese had "murdered a priest, plucked out the eye of a Jew, made use of a boy and afterwards thrown him out of a window, and had had carnal knowledge of a nun". We learn, too, of a woman who had bartered her daughter's honour for money. Sixtus not only ordered the woman to be hanged but insisted that the daughter should be present at the execution and should afterwards remain for an hour at the foot of the gibbet.

As for the prostitutes, of whom there were at this time many thousands in Rome, Sixtus attempted to segregate them in a single district, but he chose a low-lying district of the city which militated against the health of the prostitutes and the pleasure of their patrons. The girls began to defy the Pope's arrangement, and to creep back to their more salubrious homes. The Pope was now so busy (for he was also building, as we shall see) that it would be unjust to insinuate that he ceased to harry the prostitutes because the Holy See had a financial interest in their exploits: but we must keep in mind the words of Dr A. Willy and his colleagues. In their book *The Practice of Sex* (pp. 116-117) they assert that "Not only secular authorities, but also bishops and the Pope in Rome, drew revenue from the brothels, and bishops as well as popes considered them their due. The papist exchequer received from its brothels an income which is said to have been up to

20,000 ducats in the sixteenth century. The Archbishop of Mainz also received an income from his brothel: in 1442 he complained that the city was competing with him by means of a new brothel, menacing 'the revenue from the common women and daughters, and from fornication'.[1] Furthermore, brothels were actually given as estates in fee. Thus the Bishop of Würzburg leased out the Würzburg City brothel to the Count of Henneberg."

If Sixtus found that he had inherited some of the Roman brothels, he may deserve some praise for having attempted to regulate the prostitution of his city. The matter, however, was merely one of his minor activities, and this man of amazing energy not only entered upon vast building plans but also determined to put down piracy in the Mediterranean.

[1] Maurer, *Geschichte der Stadtverfassung in Deutschland.*

CHAPTER XVI

The New Pope As A Builder

IT is from Pastor that we learn most about Sixtus the Fifth's remarkable building achievements; and although we must keep in memory the plight of Paolo and Vittoria, we shall do well to realize the force of character which their principal opponent possessed. First, let us visualize the new Pope's country-house.

"The Montalto vineyard", we read, "rises from classical soil in one of the Esquiline valleys. It was situated amidst country that was entirely undeveloped and slumbered in a deep silence, broken only, at midday and in the evening, by the lin-lan-lone of the bells in the neighbouring churches of Santa Maria degli Angeli and Santa Maria Maggiore. Such a solitude, conducive to a sense of mundane impermanence and divine providence as they are revealed by history, was entirely suitable to a man who, after a lifetime crammed with toil and struggle, had at last an opportunity of withdrawing himself inwards again and of quietly contemplating the past and the future. Although the environs of the estate, where the vineyard stood, were not very healthy, the Cardinal was happier when living there than he was in

his house on the Rione Parione. . . . Here, in the days of Augustus, lay the gardens of the wealthy and also ostentatious Lollia Paolina, who was put to death on account of Agrippina's jealousy. To the north lay the immense Baths of Diocletian, and to the south, Santa Maria Maggiore, the Cardinal's favourite church, each of them showing the patina of Time. The view was incomparable. It overlooked a large part of the city, the broad countryside and the ring of mountains which encircled it. The field-workers were directly connected with the Cardinal, and among them there was one who had known him from boyhood, having been, in his time, a co-worker with the Cardinal's peasant father. . . . The new Pope showed how profoundly attached he was to his handiwork on the Esquiline when, on May the 5th, 1585, he had formally to take possession of the Lateran. By old custom this solemn ceremony ended with a banquet. Instead of giving them any banquet, Sixtus gathered the Cardinals at his villa, where they had to put up with the frugal meal of his old days. He spent the rest of the day among the grounds which he himself had cultivated. It was only in the late evening that, together with certain Cardinals who lived in the neighbourhood, he returned to the Vatican."

The Pope's villa, however, lacked a water-supply, and in order to remedy this defect he spent 60,000 scudi. He managed to bring a large mass of water to his villa,

but in the course of this operation many workmen died of malaria. Moreover, some of the famous Roman fountains are due to the creative passion of the peasant Pope. "Yesterday," says the *Rome News*, "in honour of Our Lady, the Felice waters were distributed to all the fountains of Rome, which had been made ready to receive them, their great height producing a most beautiful cascade, and, moreover, the water was carried even to Trastevere." Tasso celebrated the event in an ornate ode. Rome, he said, was now as lordly as in the age of Augustus.

Sixtus also made new roads, roads which radiated from his own palace—very much as the Cardinals were to radiate from his own powerful personality: and in order to form a true conception of his immense activity, we cannot do better than to hear what Pastor says. "Until that time," writes the great historian, "Rome was, in reality, a mediaeval city. It had no design. The streets and lanes were narrow, winding, intersecting at queer angles and cut off alike from sunshine and from air. This mediaeval appearance continued until the middle of the sixteenth century, as we see in the famous panorama painted by Marten van Heemskerk in 1536. Here we look upon fortified and four-cornered towers which, all over the place, ascend toward heaven, these being at the time the homes of noblemen and, in particular, of cardinals. Most of the churches also have

their mediaeval belfries. The little cupolas of Sixtus's period are so small that they hardly show. The houses, too, were generally far from tall; although out of their midst rise up the Renaissance palaces, the Chancellery and the new Vatican. For the most part, architects, when building the palaces of Rome, had to make use of narrow and irregular sites, and yet were able to overcome these difficulties and to erect noble and impressive buildings upon awkward plots of ground: a superb example of using a street-curve as the *motif* of graceful architecture being the Palazzo Massimi of Baldassare Peruzzi. . . . The true 'city' spread out, on a comparatively small space, over the low ground between the Tiber, the Pincio and the Campidoglio. The houses tended to rise around the river because in those days the Tiber was not merely an important waterway but also supplied the water required by the populace. . . ."

Sixtus enlarged the "squares" and improved their amenities. He made plans for diverting the rivers so that their water-power should be of more human value. He caused his chief architects, Domenico and Giovanni Fontana, to erect in Rome certain obelisks of immense antiquity which, until that time, no one had been able to raise. This was regarded as a feat so notable that there is an engraving of the final triumph at which, apparently, most of the Roman people were present. Sixtus also proposed to convert the Coliseum into work-

men's dwellings; but at this point the competent authorities, realizing that he had his eye upon other ancient monuments, were able, fortunately, to check him. Nevertheless, the old man was so violently Christian that he would have liked to remove nearly all the relics of pagan Rome. His love of obelisks, which may have some significance for the psychoanalyst, was so fruitful that, according to Brigante Colonna, Napoleon said to Canova, the sculptor, "And in Rome do you plant trees along the streets as we do in Paris?" To which Canova replied, "No, Sire: we line our streets with obelisks."

It was Pope Sixtus, again, who succeeded, where so many had failed, in setting up the great dome of Saint Peter's. His achievements in building were so important, and so swiftly effected, that we may easily sympathize with the admiration of the Venetian Ambassador. He observed that "anyone who sees the multitudinous and remarkable works of Sixtus the Fifth—the public fountains, the immense aqueducts, the roads, palaces and churches—could hardly believe that all this could have been created in a time so short". No wonder, then, if Angelo Grillo, a Benedictine abbot, should have written to Alessandro Spinola in these terms: "I am in Rome, and yet it is not Rome that I find here—so extraordinary is the number of new buildings, new streets, new squares, fountains, obelisks, aqueducts and

other marvellous objects with which . . . Sixtus has rejuvenated this antique city, so that, in fact, I can hardly find any vestige of the old Rome which was here when I left it, ten years ago."

Seldom can any dictator have manifested so much energy. He was greatly gratified by a curious gift which came from the Duke of Urbino—a handsome mule arriving at the Vatican and being hung about with the heads of thirty brigands. He was not so pleased when a number of young men—including a Sforza and two of the Orsini—strung up ten cats as though they were brigands whom the Pope had captured. Sixtus did not relish jokes. He managed to discover the identity of a few among these young men, and he had them arrested. The others fled from Rome as quickly as possible. And lastly, before we turn our attention once more to Paolo and Vittoria, we must learn of the trick which Cardinal Farnese played upon the Pope. Farnese's nephew—Ranuccio—was a son of the Duke of Parma. As he knelt to kiss the foot of the Holy Father, a pistol dropped out of his doublet. The Pope had him arrested immediately, and carried away to the Castle of Saint Angelo. He also ordered that the young man should be killed at a certain hour of the same night. The old Cardinal, Alessandro Farnese, so greatly loved for his generosity, got in touch with the authorities and persuaded them to put back all the clocks in the city.

He then went to see the Pope in order to beg mercy for his nephew. Sixtus made him wait until the hour appointed for the execution; then, having admitted him, listened to what the Cardinal had to say, and slyly granted to him the young man's life. Farnese, quite impassive, asked for a written order which would secure the liberation of the prisoner. This he obtained, and straightway went to the Castle and set his nephew free. Sixtus, learning what had happened, summoned Farnese to the Vatican, and commanded him to kneel and to repeat a Paternoster, an Ave and a Credo. "And this", said the Pope, "is merely the penance required by a friar: next time it will be the Pope who names the right penance!"

We get a clear sense of Sixtus's iron character from the fact that when he was crowned, by Cardinal Ferdinando de' Medici, custom was overridden and no prisoners were released: and, perhaps even more, from the story that when certain ecclesiastics came to congratulate him upon "this happy day"—that is to say, the day of his election—he replied grimly, "It will not be happy for everyone!"

It was certainly not a fortunate day for Paolo and Vittoria.

CHAPTER XVII

Desperate Bravado

SIXTUS, although he was so prodigiously busy with the reformation, both moral and physical, of Rome, nevertheless had not forgotten the murder of his nephew: and now Camilla, the lad's mother, was urging the Pope to take a tardy vengeance. Her very expression was a reproach to him: and we find the Venetian Ambassador reporting that "it is not so much as if to an uncle but as to a prince, who ought to remedy an ill done to anyone, that, with tears and every kind of attention, she has greatly influenced the Pope".

Paolo, as we should now expect, rushed at once to offer his felicitations to the new Pontiff. Sixtus gave him an icy reception, and the unhappy Duke went home discomfited. Before long, however, he returned, invincibly optimistic. He began what was to have been a long and flowery speech, but, when a half of it had been delivered, he found himself frozen by the old man's glaring eyes; and then the Pope said: "Nobody wishes more than I do that the Orsini should behave as he ought to. Whether he has done so up to now, he

will know by consulting his own conscience. Evil directed toward Cardinal Montalto is forgiven: but if the like is done to Sixtus, it will not be pardoned! The Pope will be kindly toward a well-behaved Orsini: but woe to one who is wicked. Take your leave: and go home at once, and rid both your palace—and Bracciano itself—of those brigands!"

At about the same time Vittoria had the courage, or the impudence, to visit old Camilla, her mother-in-law. Let us hear what happened according to Santorio, not a favourable witness. "In the crowd of persons (who came to congratulate Signora Peretti) the Accorambona", he says, "was the cynosure of all eyes because of her varied fortunes, past and present.

"Driving up with three coaches and attended by a considerable group of noble ladies, she went to greet Camilla—a notable scene for those who were present. When they had thus come together, both burst into tears and, without speaking, lightly shook hands. Camilla's mind was full of her murdered son and of a flaming desire to be avenged upon this proud woman who had once treated her with contempt. . . . Vittoria's mind was thronged with memories of the marriage-bed and the first embraces of her husband, the walls which were mute witnesses of her wedding and of all its delights, and the unhappy ghost of the betrayed Francesco. After a long silence, broken only by sobs

and tears, at last the Accorambona found her voice and, with some moaning, expressed a hope that Heaven might grant continual joy and good cheer to Camilla and the whole of the Peretti family, adding a prayer that they would not entirely forget her. This she begged in the name of her love for Camilla's son, by virtue of her tears, and as a daughter-in-law. Camilla stopped this flow of speech with a kiss, and then, when the time for parting arrived, did Vittoria the honour of accompanying her to the stairs. Coming back into the reception-room, however, she exclaimed in front of all her guests: 'What monstrous wickedness! So that iniquitous woman has again dared to confront me—to show her cruel and sinful face within my walls!'" According to the *Rome News*, "Camilla, being face to face with the Duchess, was greatly upset and cried out, weeping, 'Ah, my poor son!', and when the Duchess addressed her as 'mother', vouchsafed no answer."

It was not long before the ill-starred lovers realized that the new Pope had no intention of leaving them alone. So apprehensive were they that Paolo decided to take Vittoria for a holiday. On May the 21st, 1585, they left the castle, not knowing that they would never see it again; and the castle was put in the charge of a gentleman with the odd name of Muzio Frangipane.

The Duke's leg had now become so bad that he hoped to find a cure at the Abano baths, near Padua. In addi-

tion to the ulcer in his leg, he was now suffering abominably from erysipelas. At this time he made a will by which he was to bequeath forty thousand scudi to Vittoria, and whereby Cardinal Ferdinando and Luigi d'Este were appointed guardians of his little son, Virginio.

The journey by road—and sixteenth-century coaches were not rubber-tyred or even skilfully sprung—distressed him so direly that he asked the Venetian Republic if it would send a ship to Pesaro in order that his journeying might be made more comfortable. The Republic responded by dispatching a galley named *Pasqualiga*. In this way the Duke and Duchess did at last reach Venice, and here they were received in great style by a company of important persons, including Bartolomeo and Vettore Capello. The reader should recall that Bianca Capello, a Venetian whose beauty, pluck and unscrupulousness have embalmed her in history, had been at first the mistress and afterwards the wife of Francesco de' Medici, ruler of Florence. For the last six years she had been Grand Duchess of Tuscany. Bartolomeo was her father, a pompous nonentity who, at the beginning of her romantic career, had done everything possible to thwart her. Vettore was her brother, and he too had originally opposed her association with Francesco. Now, of course, perceiving how splendidly she had succeeded, both father and

brother were basking in the glow of her glory. It was true glory. Venice, being a republic, was at a disadvantage in the matter of titles, and for this reason had invented a new one. No Venetian could boast of being a duke, a marquis or even a knight; but eminent Venetians might now, if they were fortunate, say that they were Sons or Daughters of the Republic, and this title was accepted by the nobility of Italy as equivalent to, shall we say, a dukedom. Bianca had become a Daughter of the Republic, and neither her vain little father nor her shameless brother allowed anyone to forget it.

Paolo's health required that he should get as soon as possible to the supposedly miraculous baths at Abano: and consequently, on July the 5th, he and Vittoria, engaging to pay seven hundred scudi per annum, rented the Palazzo Foscari at Padua. Almost as soon as they had settled in, news came that Fioravante Fioravanti of Bracciano (one of Paolo's brigands) had been captured and imprisoned. He was, rather strangely, charged with having murdered Peretti: an ominous signal for Paolo. Lodovico, who is said to have lived close to the new home of the Duke and Duchess, rushed at once to Venice. He succeeded in securing the release of the brigand, but the Republic, evidently regarding him as a fellow altogether too turbulent and meddlesome, decided to give him a distant appoint-

ment, and Lodovico became Governor of Corfu. As his wife Giulia, to whom he was devoted, happened still to be living in Rome, Lodovico, who was not permitted to go there, told Filelfo (his secretary) to ask the Pope if he might fetch her. Sixtus, knowing how dangerous Lodovico was, replied that they might convene at Urbino. And soon afterwards Lodovico took a step which was of dire consequence to Vittoria. He rented the Palazzo de' Contarini, in Padua, which—all too fitly—was more often called "the Red House". And there, for a short time, we may leave him—smouldering with contempt and hatred of Vittoria and restrained only by a clan respect for Paolo, the head of the House of Orsini.

For the moment Paolo and Vittoria were as happy as the Duke's health and their sense of insecurity permitted. Vittoria was surrounded by admiring young men; and it was not her beauty alone but also her high spirits which attracted them. We find, with some interest, that one day during this period the lovers got out of their coach at Arquà in order to see the tomb of Petrarch. Nevertheless, they were deeply troubled. The Duke of Urbino and the Duke of Ferrara had behaved pleasantly, and were, indeed, destined to be the ineffective executors of Paolo's "will": but such friendliness was unimportant by comparison with the grim silence of Francesco de' Medici and of Sixtus.

They must have hoped against hope that Francesco at least would soften his heart, for at this time Vittoria steeled herself to write to Bianca Capello. She may well have thought that Bianca would sympathize with her uncomfortable position—of being acknowledged by some people as a wife and a duchess but regarded by others as a mere adventuress,—for Bianca herself had lived through some years in an equally dubious state. Their correspondence has a sharp relish because not only was a semi-duchess writing to one who had become an acknowledged duchess, but, without misrepresenting the situation, we can rightly say that one glamour-girl was asking another glamour-girl to help her.

Bianca, sprinkling her reply (according to the *Rome News*) with the words "your Excellency", concluded by saying that she had tried in vain to influence her husband in behalf of his brother-in-law, Paolo Giordano.

CHAPTER XVIII
The Death Of Paolo

THE whole situation for the Duke and Vittoria was rapidly going from bad to worse. To begin with, Camilla, as we know, was continually reminding the Pope that the murder of Peretti had never been avenged. Furthermore, we hear from the *Rome News*, on October the 30th, 1585, that "the police went to Bracciano, the other night, to apprehend certain servants of Signor Paolo Giordano, and apparently these men were his Grace's foreign-language secretaries. The general impression is that a very formidable Papal Admonition will be levelled to-day against the Duke." On November the 16th this dangerous little paper announced that "among other persons, a notable personage has been extradited—one who knows all the secrets of Signor Paolo Giordano". (We must remember that in the sixteenth century the word "signor" was still the equivalent of "milord".)

Again, the Medici brothers had finally made up their minds that Paolo Giordano, having so often married Vittoria, was a black sheep, and could not be brought to realize the obligations of his high position. Even

worse, the *Rome News* boldly stated, on November the 26th, that the Pope intended to proceed against Paolo. The Medici spies, too, were busy. One of them reported to the Grand Duke (Francesco) that "it is believed that the Pope is intent upon discovering the murderers of his nephew, being spurred on by Signora Camilla", and that Paolo's "butler and some other servants" had been arrested on suspicion of having had some connection with the murder. From the same source we hear that "this sister of the Pope is an old woman of extremely vindictive character, never forgetting anything". Camilla had, in short, so persistently nagged at the Pope that he now proposed to dispossess the Duke of all property: an act which, upon later evidence, we shall see to have been somewhat out of character. Indeed, had it not been for Camilla, Sixtus would probably have done nothing at all to avenge the murder of Camilla's son.

Early in November the Duke and Duchess went to Salò on Lake Garda, thinking that Paolo might benefit by the gentle climate. Just before going there, he summoned Francesco Rosati, the lawyer, and again drew up a last will and testament. He made the boy Virginio his sole heir, but he also provided very handsomely for Vittoria, even "restoring" to her the dowry which her old father had, in point of fact, never managed to supply. Moreover, he bequeathed sixteen thousand eight hun-

dred scudi to certain religious foundations. The Duke of Ferrara and the Duke of Urbino, who had always been favourable toward Vittoria, were appointed executors. On November the 2nd he gave the Duchess a signed copy of this will, perhaps foreseeing the trouble which it was about to cause. This copy was on parchment and adorned with the arms, beautifully painted, of the Orsini and of the Accoramboni.

On the 10th—so soon after arriving at this new and last home—the Duke became gravely ill. On the 11th and 12th he seemed to rally, and it was then, we find, that Marcello came hurrying to the scene, like a vulture. On the 13th Paolo's doctors told him that he must fast; but, characteristically enough, he insisted, seeing that he felt a little better, upon having some food: and, two hours before sunset, he went into a coma. The doctors could not even feel his pulse. And then the death rattle began. His huge body became rigid, and at length he breathed no more. That wild and troubled life was over, and although he would have thought of himself as a great sinner, our own contemporaries may regard him as having been far from entirely bad. By comparison with many princes of the later Renaissance, Paolo Giordano was good-natured and a kindly man. We must also respect his steadfast devotion to Vittoria. Perhaps she was a shallow woman, but at least she never disenchanted him: and if at times,

and for the sake of his position in the world, he had struggled desperately to break her love-magic, this fact remains to witness the strength of her charm and the true love which he felt for her—that on account of his joy in her he had "lost the world" and probably thought that the world was "well lost".

Vittoria behaved as we should now expect. At first, seeing that Paolo was dead and knowing that there was nobody any longer to stand between her and her many enemies, she caught up a pistol, intending or pretending to make an end of herself. As once before, there were other people present, and they quickly disarmed her. In the evening she wrote letters, announcing the sad news, to Bianca and to the Duke of Urbino. She had, even then, enough foresight to ask Bianca to "take care of my interests". The reader may care to peruse this letter, written on the evening of the day when her lover had died.

Most noble Lady and most deeply respected Patroness,

Although I realize how often I have to trouble your Serene Highness, as being my Mistress and Patroness, and although I am greatly grieved that I should give you so much distress, my very debt to you impels me to ask for your sympathy in the sudden loss which I have suffered to-day by the death of my lord and husband, the most Illustrious and most Excellent Duke, because I trust that you will feel some com-

passion for me in my affliction, and also because, with all the warmth of my heart, I want your Highness to condescend to take care of my interests, assuring you that if in the generosity of your soul you will do so, I shall be eternally obliged to you. I pray that Our Lord, who has thought well to impose upon me this incomparable woe, may also think well to give to your Serene Highness the greatest happiness in every way.

From Salò, the XIII November, 1585,
Your Serene Highness's
most obliged and devoted
VITTORIA ACCORAMBONA ORSINA.

We may reasonably suppose that Vittoria, since she could sign this ornate letter within a few hours of Paolo's death, was no sentimentalist and, moreover, not a woman of deep feelings: but the long-winded and obsequious style of her letter should, of course, be ascribed to the spirit of the period. When she received this letter, Bianca, a self-centred woman, probably shrugged her white shoulders, and then decided not to bother the Grand Duke about the less fortunate Vittoria.

The Grand Duke was, in fact, suspected of having poisoned Paolo Giordano; but at this time everybody, almost, was suspected of wanting to poison everybody else, and there is not the slightest evidence that Francesco had any connection with the death of Paolo. The *Rome*

News remarked, somewhat cryptically, that "in a great many respects, the death of the Duke could not have occurred at a better time", and certainly it bestirred a number of people. Marcello, for example, was, at that moment, bringing the Duke's luggage-wagons from Bracciano to Salò, and upon hearing the news decided, shrewdly enough, to change his course. There was, too, the late Duke's conscientious secretary—one Patrizio Siciliano—who immediately reported the death to Lodovico and to the boy Virginio, now Duke of Bracciano. Lodovico himself, not without annoying the Venetians, had refrained from taking up his new post at Corfu. He wanted personally to make sure that Virginio should inherit the whole of Paolo's property, notwithstanding any bequest which Paolo might have made in favour of Vittoria. In this he was strongly reinforced by Francesco de' Medici and perhaps by Ferdinando. The brothers were determined that their nephew (Virginio) should not forgo a penny, and as for the Accorambona—she was no longer any concern of theirs.

Vittoria was well aware of her peril, but she was a lover of worldly possessions and a fierce fighter. She had not the least intention of giving up all the money which Paolo had bequeathed to her. However, she was both frightened and friendless, although she certainly supposed that the Dukes of Urbino and Ferrara would

see that Paolo's will was duly executed; and, having communicated with the rascally Marcello, she set out to join him at Padua. Neither of them can have been at all confident of the future. We know, for instance, that Vittoria wrote letters to several important persons, including the genial Cardinal Farnese. She petitioned him to ask the Pope if he would befriend and protect her: and so unpredictable was the Pope that we find him sending her a present of five hundred scudi. He would never have given her a scudo unless he had felt that she deserved something, and his action, therefore, does credit alike to himself and to Vittoria.

Lodovico, determined at all costs to keep the Duke's property within the Orsini family, even wrote to his secretary, Filelfo, ordering him to seize the luggage-wagons which Marcello was taking to Padua. Lodovico overtook Vittoria at Verona, and a strange meeting it must have been. From there they travelled to Padua, and at Padua the impetuous Lodovico discovered the Duke's baggage, had it unpacked and proceeded to compile an inventory of the contents. And meanwhile the Medici brothers were busily attempting to make the Pope realize that Vittoria had no claim whatsoever upon the Orsini property. Francesco, in fact, wrote to Ferdinando, on November the 26th, saying that he was not sending a copy of Paolo's will "because Lodovico writes to say that he is sending one, in which we

can see the fantastic extravagances into which that woman lured him. You would therefore be doing a great service to Virginio if you could find some way of persuading his Holiness that Paolo's legacy is null and void, seeing that Gregory forbade him to marry her and also because of the murder of her husband which can be proved to have been instigated by him, and, finally, because the legacy does wrong to Virginio and ought, on every account, to be quashed."

So grave was the situation for Vittoria that she actually "loaned" her jewels to Massimilla, one of her sisters and now a nun in the convent of Tor de' Specchi. Cardinal Ferdinando, finding out that she had made this arrangement, went so far as to dispute her right to make any such disposition of goods which, in his opinion, belonged to Virginio. He took the trouble of going with a lawyer to the convent, where, having interviewed Giulia Maffei, the Mother Superior, he and the lawyer made an exact list of everything which they discovered. Francesco meanwhile was evidently afraid that Lodovico would rush into unwise action against Vittoria, for on November the 30th he wrote: "Your lordship must be content to hold up matters until you receive definite orders, and until then must see that nothing whatsoever is initiated." Otherwise, he says, Virginio's welfare might be endangered.

The young man was, however, incapable of doing

nothing, and when he had found out that Vittoria still retained a ring, a small cross and an Agnus Dei which the Duke had used to wear, he demanded that she should yield them up. With her usual spirit she refused to do so unless she received a specific order from Virginio. The "ring of Saint Bridget" was an old family heir-loom, and in his will the Duke particularly says: "Furthermore, because of her devotion *in vita sua tantum*, I bequeath to her the Ring of Saint Bridget, which after her death shall revert to my heirs." At this time, moreover, Marcello unfortunately disgraced himself again, having one of his under-brigands, to whom he owed money, shot dead: an incident which Lodovico said was "considered utterly abominable by everybody." Indeed, the virtuous Lodovico, still straining at the leash, exclaims in a letter to the Grand Duke: "You see what a pack of scoundrels I have to deal with."

It was perhaps the likelihood of losing Marcello which made Vittoria write to her favourite brother, Flaminio, asking him to stay with her, an invitation which he accepted—with fatal results: and it may well have been the general hopelessness of the situation that caused her to tell Sixtus that she desired to end her days in a convent.

CHAPTER XIX
The Murder

THE Grand Duke of Tuscany was opposing Vittoria with so much energy that the Dukes of Urbino and Ferrara, who were executors of Paolo's will, had not the courage to champion her claims; and we realize how desperate she must have been when we find her writing again to Bianca. A secretary composed the following introductory sentence: "Most Serene[1] Lady and my most Esteemed Patroness, I have written several times to your Serene Highness concerning my affairs and myself, and although I have not had any reply I do, nevertheless, desire always to live in your good graces and under your protection, and moreover to show how truly I am your devoted servant; wherefore I come again with an assurance that I bear towards you the deepest affection of which I am capable, and that, kissing your hands, I pray without ceasing that Our Lord may always vouchsafe you every happiness." To this florid rigmarole Vittoria, taking up the quill, added: "I beg your Serene Highness to think kindly

[1] A customary form of address in Venice, which itself was called 'the Serene Republic'.

of me in the midst of these trials and tribulations, to keep me under your protection and to treat me in all ways as your very humble servant."

By this time the Grand Duchess of Tuscany was, it seems, thoroughly bored by the misfortunes of her "humble and grateful servant", for she could not be bothered to send any answer. Perhaps it was Vittoria's very loneliness which roused again her indomitable spirit. At least she resolved to put up something of a fight against the Medici brothers; and when Francesco ordered Lodovico to send Paolo's effects to Florence, she consulted an exceedingly famous lawyer —Marcantonio Pellegrino—who took a most favourable view of her case. And well he might do so, for the Duke's wishes could not have been more clearly expressed. In addition to all the presents which he had given to her at Magnanapoli (and he confirmed the gift of them) he states: "and furthermore, in case I should die away from Rome and from my own State, I give her all the gold, silver and other valuables which I have brought with me."

Now, Pellegrino was a man of such eminence that even the Medici would need to be careful. He was also a man of quick action, for he took the Last Will of Paolo Giordano to the Mayor of Padua, who, having made certain that it was no forgery, ruled that Vittoria was to go before a tribunal and make good her claim

to Paolo's bequests. Lodovico was, of course, furious when he found himself obstructed by the Norman Birkett of the age; and he rushed to another lawyer, who, as we might expect, delivered a contrary opinion. The Mayor, uncomfortably placed between these two experts, finally decided that, pending a solution of the difficulty, all the disputed valuables should be held in custody by a local officer named Captain Soardo.

This arrangement was not at all to the liking of Lodovico, and it is probable that he now made up his mind to take dreadful action. In order to imagine what happened next we must apprehend several points. Vittoria, for instance, may have been alarmed by the prospect of poverty, but at present she was not poor and we must not think of her as living at Padua in some small house. On the contrary, the Palazzo Cavalli, now "The Royal University Institute of Geology", is an impressive three-storeyed mansion with nine tall front-windows on each storey. Trying still to live in the manner of a duchess, she was employing a considerable staff of servants and also entertaining a number of faithful or dastardly friends. Her brother Flaminio was there, often lightening the tension by singing to his lute; and Giulio Cesare Brancacci, Scipione Longo and a Spaniard who cannot be certainly identified. We may presume, too, that Caterina and

the Greek sorceress were still in her retinue: but "on the ground floor there were two traitors—Furio Savorgnano della Bandiera of Udine, who had been much loved by the Duke, and that Domenico of Città di Castello who, having been sent by Vittoria to Rome, had already returned, or rather, as it seems, had never set out".

Lodovico, in the Red House, was only a short way distant, for Padua is not a large city. We should have difficulty now in discovering where the Red House was. Even Gnoli, who was the archetype of those who explore all avenues, can tell us only that the house was on the Brenta, not far from the castle, and between the old and the new walls of the city. Later students have decided that it stood upon the site of another building on the Bacchiglione. The name derived from the fact that the columns of the portico were of red marble; and, very appropriately, the house itself was painted red.

Here Lodovico entertained his company of brigands. Filelfo, too, had returned to this fold of black sheep; but when Lodovico dispatched him to the Mayor, with instructions to see that the Mayor should reject the warnings of Vittoria's formidable advocate, Pellegrino, the poor little man was refused an interview. This happened on Sunday, December the 22nd, 1585; and no one will fail to understand how such a rebuff

incensed the Orsini pride of Lodovico. He was indeed so furious that he went, that very morning, to see Vittoria at her mansion: and here, concealing neither his contempt for her pedigree nor his detestation of her personality, he attempted to browbeat a young woman who was quite capable of standing up for herself. How this battle of anger might have ended we shall not know, for, luckily enough, it was broken by the arrival of certain gentlewomen who had come to visit the Accorambona. She must have given them an extremely cordial welcome, and Lodovico, who had, of course, a respect for the current code of manners, politely retired: politely, but not without murmuring menaces which, in all likelihood, Vittoria did not take seriously.

He went back, with a scorching heart, to the Red House; and as he rode home he reflected that if the Medici brothers were so irresolute in behalf of Virginio (half Medici but also half Orsini); if the Pope seemed not to have time for this particular business; if the Mayor of Padua was so lily-livered and (as we should now say) so democratic as to weigh carefully the cause of a woman who was obviously lost; then somebody, somebody of the blue Orsini blood, somebody who cared passionately for Virginio's right of inheritance to the whole Bracciano property, somebody who could not endure the very existence of this Vittoria, by whom

the Head of the Family had been publicly disgraced for the last three years,—that somebody must take instant action. The wretched woman was putting up far too good a fight; and with Pellegrino at her side she might even secure a large proportion of Bracciano's treasure. It was nothing to Lodovico that the Duke had given those jewels to Vittoria because he had shared so much delight with her—and so much anxiety. The young man honestly believed that it would be monstrous if she were to retain one pearl or a single scudo. To him, moreover, as to so many persons of that age, property was much more sacred than life; and if something had to be done, this "very fiery particle" was ready to do it.

Apparently Francesco de' Medici was aware of his intention and had secretly approved it, for there is still in existence a confidential letter sent to Francesco by Lodovico. In this letter he says: "Signor Prospero will communicate to your Serene Highness some of my thoughts touching the particulars of that which I do not think well to write because it is not a matter which ought to be set down on paper: wherefore if your Serene Highness will hear what Signor Prospero has to tell you, and will let me know your mind, you will find that I shall not be tardy in executing your charge."

There was only one way of securing the whole of the

Bracciano property for the Orsini family. The counter-claimant would have to be removed from this three-dimensional world with all its incompatible interests. Lodovico therefore, on the night of December the 22nd, held a secret session with three of the most unscrupulous villains in his gang. They were Count Paganello Ubaldi of Arezzo, Captain Splandiano Adami of Fermo, and Captain Tolomeo Visconti of Recanati; and of these three inhuman ruffians, Tolomeo Visconti was the most abominable. After a short time the rest of the gang—twenty-two in number—were summoned and received their instructions. They proceeded to collect arquebuses, daggers, cloaks, masks and false beards. Then, in the winter darkness, they set out, avoiding the centre of the city, breaking up into small groups, and going toward the Porte Contarini, across the San Giovanni bridge, by the Via Colmellon, across the Molin bridge and from there along the riverside until at last they came within sight of Vittoria's mansion. Thereupon, acting as experienced murderers, they posted sentinels on all the roads and lanes by which anybody inside the mansion might conceivably make a dashing escape; and then the three principal gangsters, together with five of their underlings, took up a position just under the wall of the house.

It was, by strange irony, the Eve of Saint Vittoria's Day; and soon after dawn Vittoria Accoramboni

received the Sacraments. After this, she went into her bedroom and began to tell her beads. Early though it was, other members of the household were also thinking of Saint Vittoria, for we find that Flaminio, together with three other guests, had stayed up all night, keeping the vigil, and were now sitting in the reception-room that was next to Vittoria's. Flaminio, they say, was playing a *Miserere* on his lute. And while these five souls were thus religiously employed upstairs, the traitors who inhabited a part of the ground floor, hearing the soft signal of the eight murderers, opened a side door. The murderers, being skilled men, lighted their flambeaux and, as a precaution, unbolted the main door. If necessary, their confederates could now come to the rescue; and, after all, nobody could be quite sure how fierce a fight the men in the mansion might offer.

Going upstairs, they came to the reception-room and pulled aside the heavy velvet curtain which, as in so many Italian houses, took the place of a door. The four men who were inside the room started with astonishment and terror; but now not a second could be lost or the murderers might be surrounded and overpowered by the entire household. They might even lose their valuable lives. Splandiano, therefore, covered Flaminio with his arquebus. The others rushed at the three guests and silenced them by pointing daggers at their

throats. Splandiano fired, but Flaminio, cowering against one of the walls, had instinctively held up his lute as a protection for his head. Then Splandiano fired again and wounded him in the shoulder. He fell. He stumbled to his feet. He made a dash for Vittoria's room, thus trying to prolong his life for at least a few more minutes. Even in his panic he must have known that he had fled to the unsafest room in the house, but, having got to it, he hid himself under his sister's bed.

By this time the household was wide awake with terror. The women servants closed the front door, whereupon the brigands who were outside fired into the bolts and shattered them. Everybody was running to and fro, screaming or shouting: and Vittoria, knowing that the worst had happened and that she, not Flaminio, was to be the murderers' prize and victim, had risen from her prayers and stood at bay, expecting to be shot.

Three of the brigands—probably the three principals—burst into her room, dazzling her sight with the fluttering glare of their flambeaux. Unlike Flaminio, she went down upon her knees and prayed to an ivory crucifix. Two of her assailants held her down. The third—Tolomeo Visconti—stood above her, dagger in hand. Then he said, "You are ripe for death. You must pay the price of your infamy!"

She asked quietly if she might say a prayer. The brigand's reply was to pull down her bodice so that she was naked to the waist. "I forgive you," said Vittoria, with astounding self-possession, "but I should prefer to die dressed!" She had covered her breasts by crossing her arms, but the brigands had little difficulty in forcing her arms apart. Tolomeo in a business-like manner put his hand under her left breast, feeling for the heart-beat: and Vittoria, sensitive to this outrage, moaned, "Jesus! Jesus!" Then Tolomeo, driving his dagger into her body and twisting the steel, grinned and shouted, "Has it got your heart? Say, say,—has it got your heart?" Vittoria collapsed, murmuring, "Jesus! . . . I forgive you."

This extraordinary behaviour was too much even for the sub-human mind of Tolomeo. He is said to have gasped out the words, "What have we done? We have murdered a saint!"

His companions, much less sentimental, realized that they had not finished their job and might be punished by the terrible Lodovico. They therefore hauled Flaminio from under the bed, stabbed him so that his body was found to be wounded in seventy-four places, and finally smashed his skull. Having finished off the mild and inoffensive Flaminio, they stormed through the house looking for the really abominable Marcello, who had pandered his sister to Paolo Giordano: but

Marcello, having seen that Vittoria's barometer was falling rapidly, had hidden himself in a monastery.[1]

[1] The story of Vittoria's death has been told many times. In the main, I have followed the account given by Brigante Colonna because, beyond question, it is the fullest and the best.

CHAPTER XX

Excitement In Padua

VITTORIA had been a worldly little soul whose religion was probably conventional and superstitious. She had longed to be a great person in Roman society; she had fought desperately for the sticks and stones of the material world; and she may have held fast to Paolo Giordano mostly because without him she would have lost both wealth and position: but she had been strong enough to die bravely. And generation after generation, those who read old stories accord some measure of honour to anyone who, like Charles the First or Vittoria, meet a violent death with dignity.

The news caused a sensation throughout the Italian States, and it may have been brought by travellers almost at once to England and other countries. Our ancestors had never heard, we may surmise, of Paolo Giordano, but any event which involved Francesco de' Medici would have interested them. Both the Medici were delighted by Lodovico's bold handiwork, for it meant that Virginio would have no more trouble in claiming his father's fortune: and the Pope was relieved,

no doubt, that he would no longer have to satisfy Camilla by taking a vengeance for which he had no inclination. The Dukes of Ferrara and Urbino must certainly have felt ashamed of their inaction.

We have from Filelfo himself an account of what happened immediately after the murder. "I was called", he says, "to my lord's room where many gentlemen of the household were assembled, and my lord said, 'Have you heard the news?' and I answered, 'What news?' He continued: 'Scipione Longo has just been here, and reports that certain masked men entered the house of Lady Vittoria and murdered both her and her brother Flaminio, but could not discover Marcello.' I was thunderstruck, and shrugged my shoulders, and said that it would be a good thing to notify the law officers. He replied that Scipione had already done this. There was a great deal of discussion about the whole affair right up to bed-time when I went to my own quarters."

No sooner had the "Rectors" (or Civil Guardians) of Padua received news of the murder than, shrewdly discounting the transparent bluff of Lodovico (through whom it came to them), they acted. Padua was at this time a dependency of the great Venetian Republic, and accordingly the Mayor and the Captain of the City sent an urgent message to the Republic, asking for instructions. They also called out the bombardiers,

who camped in the main Square, and reinforced the guards at all the gates of Padua. The citizens decided immediately that Lodovico Orsini was the culprit; and their pity for Vittoria, no less than their abhorrence of Lodovico, was fanned into high flame when the parish priest and a group of friars, carrying lighted candles, transported the ruined bodies of Vittoria and Flaminio to the Church of St Philip and St James, where the friars intoned psalms, the priest pronounced absolution, and the bodies were buried at the centre of the nave.

Lodovico was of a spirit so orgulous that at first he could not believe that the middle-class Paduan authorities would dare to charge him with the murder or would act in any way against so illustrious a member of the Orsini clan. When, however, some of his followers were arrested and examined, under torture, he went proudly to the greatest building in Padua, the Captain's Palace, but here he was informed that the Civil Guardians would see only himself or himself and one companion. Evidently they were apprehensive lest he might seize the city; and at this interview, according to Filelfo, "my lord could hardly bring himself to meet them, and he spoke few words". When next he confronted the Captain of the City, he complained of having been kept waiting—an insult, he declared, which he had never accepted even from a King or a Pope. He then stated that he had come in

order to demand the goods which Lady Vittoria had obtained from his late cousin the Duke of Bracciano, adding that he did so as a representative of the rightful possessor, the Duke's son—Virginio Orsini. He next told the Captain that he must be granted a free pass for a messenger who was to give a full account of the whole proceedings to the Pope at Rome and the Medici at Florence. The Captain, returning a mild answer, ended by asking whether Lodovico had any suspicions concerning the murderers?

Lodovico became angry. He said that he knew nothing and had no suspicions: and when the Captain and his entourage pressed the point, Lodovico exclaimed, "I and my peers are not accustomed to being cross-examined!" And with that, he stalked out. Soon afterwards a messenger arrived, carrying letters written by Lodovico to the Medici, and intercepted. The Captain ordered that they should be copied.

On the next day two representatives of Venice arrived, and, significantly enough, one of them was the man who had suggested that Filelfo should remind his master that "Venice is governed in accordance with law and religion, not by force". These two men were authorized to take any action which the Republic itself would take.

Lodovico, seeing that he was suspected by everyone and hearing that the Venetian representatives had

arrived, shut himself up in the Red House; and when Filelfo suggested that either he or his master should apply for a pass to Venice, Lodovico told him not to be a fool. All that the faithful Filelfo could do, therefore, was to creep from the Red House on the night of Christmas Eve, and spy out the position. He came back depressed, for it was quite clear that the Red House was already in a state of siege. Lodovico did manage to smuggle a letter to the Grand Duke of Tuscany, and the Grand Duke wrote to Ferdinando, who was in Rome, urging him to acquaint Sixtus with the situation: but that was all, for Florence, which could bully the Duke of Bracciano, had to be more than careful in its dealings with Venice.

And the Venetian Government, which vehemently disapproved of murder,[1] was manifestly certain of Lodovico's guilt, and in order that he might not escape, commanded that all the gates of Padua should be closed. In a long stern letter which that Government sent to the Paduan authorities, the latter are expressly required "to take Lord Lodovico, alive or dead". Filelfo, who had expected to spend Christmas with his wife, tried once more to discover what the city authorities were doing; and he brought back to the Red

[1] This is not to say, of course, that the Venetians were ideally humane—the dungeons in Venice prove the contrary; but they approved only of suppressing those who had broken the law.

House a report of their military preparations which was so intimidating that Lodovico at once ordered his brigands to fortify the house and to stand in readiness for an attack.

In point of fact, the house was completely surrounded, but even so the proud Lodovico would not yield. After some time a Paduan officer—Giacomo Frangimeli—advanced toward the Red House, and stated that Padua expected Lodovico to yield and to present himself, and his bodyguard, without arms, at the Captain's Palace. He added that Padua was accustomed to treating with kingdoms and republics, but not with private persons. At first Lodovico bluffed, but soon afterwards he sat down to his table and wrote out the conditions on which he would surrender. He threw the document to Frangimeli. The negotiations were abortive: but, with limited food in the Red House, something more would have to be tried. And accordingly Lodovico summoned Filelfo and dictated to him the following manifesto: "Illustrious Rectors, I am astonished that you should take such rigorous action against me and against my dwelling in connection with a matter which is still obscure, notwithstanding that I am Lodovico Orsino, cousin of Giordano, nephew of Valerio and of Bartolomeo de Alviano, every one of whom has on occasion espoused the interests of your State (Venice) and been ready to lay down his life for it." A few lines

later he wrote that "If your Lordships have no intention of proceeding against me in the usual legal fashion, to which I should always submit, I must protest, calling God and the world as my witnesses, that, rather than endure insults, I shall be compelled to shed blood for blood, even if I must, by perishing, leave a clear though unhappy example of my innocence and of the evil fortune which the House of Orsini receives from your Republic. With which I kiss your hands." To this Filelfo added a postscript which means, "I am ready to put myself once more at the disposal of the governors".

Messages went to and fro. And since the fall of the Red House seemed to be inevitable, Lodovico finally attempted to convey a letter to the authorities, hiding it in one of the shoes of a daredevil named Colonel Nobili. He, poor fellow, set out upon his dangerous mission, but almost at once he was perceived and shot down. The letter, which is in the archives of the Medici, is superinscribed with the words, "This letter was written at the time when Lord Lodovico found himself besieged in his house, but it was never delivered to the Rectors and was found in the shoe of Colonel Lorenzo de' Nobili, who was slain by artillery".

On Christmas Day, while many of the citizens crowded to see what would happen, this artillery pounded away at the Red House. The brigands, firing from the windows, put up an ineffectual reply;

and before long a large part of the front wall was in ruins. At last the main entrance collapsed. Any further resistance would have been futile; and even Lodovico was afraid that he might suffocate in the dense smoke. Certain Paduan officers, including Captain Soardo (who had kept Vittoria's jewels, pending a decision about them), went forward and demanded that the Red House garrison should come forth. Many of the brigands had already fallen: and when Lodovico surrendered to Captain Soardo, he said, "Pray see that these men are decently buried". He was then driven in a carriage to the Captain's Palace: but the citizens, perceiving that the battle was over, rushed forward, and there was a frantic scramble for the heads of Lodovico's dead supporters.

CHAPTER XXI
"*A Precious Jewel in His Head*"

VENICE had acted so swiftly, and continued to act with the utmost economy of time, because its rulers anticipated that the Grand Duke of Tuscany would try to save his kinsman Lodovico from justice. They were, as usual, right. Most of the brigands remained in the half-demolished Red House, using the basement as their headquarters and awaiting news of their master. Knowing his truculent spirit, many of them probably supposed that he would extricate himself; but a few managed somehow or other to escape from Padua. One of these fugitives arrived in Florence on December the 29th and was admitted almost at once to the presence of the Grand Duke. In the State Archives of Florence there is a letter which Francesco wrote on the same day to Cardinal Ferdinando, who was in Rome. The Grand Duke said: "When I told your Illustrious Lordship about the fate which has befallen the Accorambona, I did not know that Lord Lodovico was responsible. The deed had been ascribed to some of Moricone's associates. Just now, however, one of Lodovico's men has turned up, and he says that,

soon after the event, Lord Lodovico was summoned to the Mayor's Palace at Padua, whither he went, armed and with attendants. The Mayor offered him fair words but at the same time communicated with Venice, whence a plenipotentiary was at once dispatched: and when Lord Lodovico appeared before the Venetian in full military manner, the latter told him that he and his men must be disarmed, whereupon, refusing to obey, he fortified his house, from which he had to be expelled by artillery and at the cost of several lives. He himself was ultimately arrested, and found himself a prisoner together with some of his men. Although it is necessary to act with discretion, seeing that Lodovico has misbehaved himself so badly, you should help him in whatever may seem to you the best way." If Francesco had been able to communicate by telephone with his brother, it is just possible that Lodovico might have outlived his victim by many years.

In the Mayor's Palace Lodovico tried, as usual, to show by speech and manner how impudent it was to accuse an Orsini of any misdemeanour; but the Mayor quietly told him that his time for making speeches was now over. Captain Soardo then removed the dagger which Lodovico wore in his belt and informed him that he was a prisoner. "And now, milord," said the Mayor, "bring your men to the Palace by sending them some token." Lodovico handed over one of his rings;

but when the city's envoy presented it to the garrison at the Red House they suspected a trap. It might, after all, have been taken from the hand of their master after he had been killed. Lodovico had therefore to send them a written command. At this time they numbered thirty-three, including servants (of whom two, and one of these the cook, were Frenchmen), and, with the loyalty of their kind, these men submitted to being bound and thereupon escorted through the streets to the Captain's Palace. The two Rectors, the Captain and certain other officials then accompanied Lodovico to a large room in the same palace, and here they left him, bolted in and alone. Filelfo also was accorded a room to himself, but the rest of the prisoners were huddled unceremoniously into a big prison called "The Mayor's Room".

Meanwhile, the police had entered Vittoria's mansion, and had discovered within it bloodstained daggers and some of the false beards. A dagger, known to have belonged to Liverotto Paolucci, was found in the well; and when they came across a letter in Lodovico's hand ("I don't want any more chatter . . . Here is a job of work which you would be wise to undertake . . . Burn this letter"), the proof of his responsibility became overwhelming. The letter had been written, presumably, to one of the traitors in Vittoria's household.

Most, if not all, of Lodovico's followers were put to

torture, including even Filelfo. It is, indeed, from his deposition at this time, that we get his description (p. 175) of what happened immediately after the murder. And since the authorities had now a formidable bundle of confessions, they decided that it was unnecessary to submit an Orsini to the insult of being interrogated. Instead, they sent the dossier to Venice, asking for further instructions.

Although it was Christmas Day, the Venetians, anxious to forestall Francesco de' Medici, went at once into council. One of the Senators attempted to persuade the Assembly that Lodovico ought to be given a public trial, but, in accordance with the sentiment of the time, most of his colleagues felt that the public trial of a nobleman would injure the prestige of their class; and, the question being put to a vote, only six were in favour of the Senator's proposal, whereas a hundred and seventy-two voted for a private death. The Doge Pasquale Cicogna confirmed this judgement. In the course of a long and stately letter the Venetian Government says: "You, the two Rectors, after giving the aforesaid Lodovico Orsini some three hours in which to make confession and to put his affairs in order, must see that he is strangled in the prison which he now inhabits, and furthermore must hang in public all those of his followers who are already known by legal process to have merited this punishment, and to do so as

expeditiously as you can. . . . We wish you to use the utmost care in investigating the case of Filelfo, whom we know to have been a very intimate associate of Lodovico Orsini, and one who was privy to all his plans and secrets."

The only request which the chief prisoner had preferred was that he should be allowed a food-taster—in itself a notable commentary upon the times. Now, the Venetian letter arrived late at night; but, in view of the words "to do so as expeditiously as you can", the two Rectors and a Venetian representative sent at once for the Captain, the Warden of the Palace and the Chief Constable. These last three opened the door of Lodovico's prison, while the other trio remained just outside. Lodovico waked up. Evidently his visitors had still some fear of this impetuous young man, for the Constable stated that it had been decided to take him to Venice at dawn. Would he therefore be so good as to dress and then to allow his wrists and ankles to be chained? Lodovico, fancying his chance at Venice, submitted with as good a grace as he could summon: but when he had been safely fettered, his captor said, "Your Lordship, the Serene Doge has always firmly maintained that the Laws of his State must be observed; and since it is his will that your Lordship shall die within three hours, I have been delegated by the Rectors to announce this sentence of

death". Lodovico, astonished and sick at heart, thought instantly of his family honour, fearing lest an Orsini was to be publicly hanged; and he asked, "In what manner am I to die?"

"As befits you," was the answer,—"in prison."

Then, having been assured that his body would be buried, he enquired politely whether the Rectors would be so courteous as to visit him. The Rectors came into the prison and proceeded to urge that he should make confession. "Yes," he replied, "I desire to confess myself. Death does not dismay me. I grieve only that I do not know the cause for it." To this the Mayor answered, "Milord, you know it all too well".

After a few moments, Lodovico said, "I ask you to be so kind as to release my right hand so that I may write a letter to my poor wife and acquaint her with my wishes". When this service had been granted and the manacle removed, the Paduan authorities withdrew, and were replaced by a Capuchin friar and the parish priest of San Clemente. To the latter he made confession, presumably even admitting to his part in the murder of Vittoria. Then, while—as it seems—the two priests remained in the room, perhaps praying for him, he hobbled to the table and in the dim light of the prison-lamp wrote a long last letter to his wife, Giulia. This letter is so remarkable, and reveals so

clearly the nobler side of his passionate nature, that the reader must be enabled to read it in full.

Illustrious and most belovèd Wife,

Since it has pleased the Lord God that I should pass to another life, for which I bless his Divine Majesty, realizing, as I do, how many of my actions must have offended Him, I want to send your Illustrious Ladyship these few lines for no purpose except to ask, exhort and conjure you to accept all this with that resignation which has characterized you from birth, and that you may realize that I am willing to meet my fate and quite ready to die. Therefore be so good as to console yourself, as I want you to do, inasmuch that I assure you that I shall receive great consolation in that other world. And touching upon that, I beg your Illustrious Ladyship to see that every single person to whom I am in debt shall be satisfied in order that I may not have that burden upon my soul.

I ask you also to see that masses to the expense of twenty ducats may be said for the soul of Signor Paolo, of blessèd memory, just as I should myself have arranged. I want you to give twenty golden ducats to Messer Paccarone because I have just remembered that he lent that sum to me when I was a student in Perugia: and in case the sum was not quite so large, or possibly not due to him, then I want you to give it to Messer Eugenio—and both of them came from Fermo—because he will then be the right man. I want you furthermore to give twenty-four or

twenty-five golden ducats, the one or the other according to my debt, to my cousin Signor Federico Cesis because he lent me that amount when I was in Perugia, studying.

And while I am on the subject, I recommend to your Illustrious Ladyship all my servants, and charge you to look after them as I would myself. You could distribute a thousand ducats between them, taking into consideration the degree in which I liked them and the length of their service. In particular I recommend Rutilio and the page Luigi, asking that they shall always remember me, and to them you might well give a large part of the aforesaid thousand ducats because they were the servants who were most to my mind. Moreover, I desire you to spend five hundred ducats, wherever you may think best, to the end that prayers may be offered to our Lord God for the salvation of my soul.

I desire also that you shall send home all those who may wish to go—I mean among the persons who are in my service,—provided that Lelio approves. As for the rest of my gentlemen, I want you to ask them to pray to our Lord God for me, and to show you and my brother the same devotion which they manifested toward myself. And since your Illustrious Ladyship has not come to a time of life when you might expect to be widowed, I hereby ask, exhort, conjure and command that you shall marry again, for I shall be well content to think of all the happiness which you may still enjoy when you have

executed my wishes. If, on the other hand, you prefer widowhood to remarriage, I leave you sole heir of all that I possessed when living, but with a wish that after your own death everything shall go to my brother and, if he predeceases you, to that representative of our Monterotondo branch who shall be nearest of kin. And by the way, I forgot to ask you to see that one of the maids shall be married at once with a dowry of fifty ducats, and to give a further fifty as a charity to the Capuchins at Padua, and a further fifty to the parish priest of San Clemente, for such is my wish. And because I have spent a good deal here on behalf of his Excellency milord Virginio, according to Tassino's accounts—or rather from his own pocket—I want to repay him. See that the procurator Contarino is reimbursed for his expenses, and bear in mind that there are in this place twenty silver plates of mine, pawned for two hundred ducats. In the house of Signor Panigaia—that is to say, in the part of the "Red House" which he has rented—there is a *baciletto*, a *bocaletto*, a *cortello*, spoons and forks, a silver salt-cellar and other goods.

And since there is no one at home who is in a position to use arms, your Illustrious Ladyship should give to Signor Anselmo Anselmi my pistol, large arquebus, powder-flask, purse, dagger and seal, telling him to present them to his Serenity the Doge,[1] in memory of me, and take for yourself the ring which

[1] It was the Doge, let us remember, who had told the Paduan authorities to put Lodovico to death.

I always wear, and recommend milord my brother to our holy Pope Sixtus, to the illustrious Medici and to his Excellency Lord Virginio, asking them, for my sake, to give him their protection.

And so that my body may be buried in a place which I should approve, be so kind as to see that it is laid close to that of my father in Santa Maria dell' Horto (at Venice), next to the body of Signor Valerio, of happy memory, and also that, when you yourself shall die, you share my burial-place.

That is all that I wish or can at this moment remember to tell your Illustrious Ladyship: wherefore do me the courtesy of executing all these matters, praying that our Blessèd Lord God may vouchsafe me rest among the Blessèd, but, knowing that I am a most unhappy sinner, I kiss your hands and beg your forgiveness.

From the Camozzana prison, the 27th of December, 1585.

Sent by your Illustrious Ladyship's
husband and servant,

LODOVICO ORSINI.

After a little while, having wondered what he might have forgotten, he added a postscript.

The necklace which I wear with the cross that contains relics, the stones being jasper, I give to your Illustrious Ladyship so that, together with the ring, it may bring you my love. . . . The Saint Bridget

ring [1] is in the leather drum (*tamburo*) at the house of Count Orazio, the key of which is kept by the excellent Capitanio, and the said ring may be found in a little silver box, wrapped up in cotton. Inside the same drum there is a silver seal which belonged to Lord Paolo, and a silver buscià bearing his Excellency's coat-of-arms. It also contains many letters from his Excellency. There are also some of mine, and about three hundred ducats which belong to me. What is mine I give to my wife. In the same house there are clothes and some silver goods which should also go to her.

Another afterthought caused him to add another postscript.

In reimbursing Tassino [he says], you ought to know that all the money which came to me after Lord Paolo Giordano's death did not suffice for what I did in his honour; I had to spend a large sum in going to Salò, and a lot more on horses and carriages to take me to Venice and back, and then I have spent much in maintaining myself here. I am telling you this in order that my soul may not be troubled about it, and that you may instruct Tassino to put these expenses to my account. In this way your major-domo will be able to make out how much I have justly had, and that is all that I need say to the Reverend Father.

LODOVICO ORSINI.

[1] The family heirloom which Paolo had given to Vittoria.

It was now three o'clock in the morning; and after he had spent a little time in reading a book of prayers, the Jesuit Brothers and the Chief Executioner came to see him. The former intoned a litany to which he made the repeated response *Ora pro me*. At length, admitting his offences, he arose and embraced all the persons present; and the executioner, it is said, was embarrassed by the condescension of so great a personage.

They brought forward a red stool of plaited straw; and Lodovico, seating himself, loosened his doublet and the shirt of red silk which he wore beneath it, and made the sign of the cross.

The manacles and fetters were readjusted, and a cord was tied round his waist. Then he asked that someone should stand close to him, and murmured "Jesus, Jesus". The executioner went behind the stool, and took out a cord of red silk. Had Filelfo been the victim, a hempen cord would have been sufficient, but in those times a nobleman, even at such a moment, was accorded his privileges. The executioner manipulated the tourniquet, but the silk snapped, and another had to be twisted. At this second attempt they expelled the breath and the life from the body of Lodovico Orsini.

Only a few hours later, it was placed on a bier and, accompanied by forty monks carrying torches, deposited at the centre of the nave in the Cathedral. Candles were lighted round the bier, and throughout

the day processions of morbid sightseers trailed past it, many of them abruptly finding that they were sorry for the dead man. On the morning of the 28th, moreover, the execution of the other culprits began with the public hanging of Furio Savorgnano and Domenico of Città di Castello, two ex-employees of Paolo Giordano. They were the traitors who had admitted Lodovico's ruffians into Vittoria's mansion. After they had been strung up, torn with red-hot pincers, and left dangling, the actual assassin—Tolomeo Visconti—was hoisted on to the scaffold; but in the few days of his imprisonment he had been busy with the problem of avoiding the noose; and just as the crowd was anticipating a really delicious excitement, a herald rode up to the scaffold, announcing a reprieve. The amazed spectators could not guess that Tolomeo had informed against a monk who had been engaged in coining—at that time, as everybody knows, an exceedingly grave crime. The Paduan authorities had, therefore, issued the reprieve while they sent to Venice for a ruling.

The Venetians replied curtly that they would deal with the coiner and that meanwhile the head and chief of the criminals must be hanged at once—"and so put an end to the matter". Tolomeo was, however, to be spared additional tortures, which in some moods we may think to have been a pity. The Republic desired, no doubt, to encourage informers.

The next day was a Sunday: but on Monday the 30th the citizens enjoyed a remarkable spectacle, one which they must have talked about to the end of their days, for no fewer than sixteen of the rascals were hanged, including Tolomeo himself: and, better still, another couple, familiar to the reader, were torn, disembowelled and quartered—to wit, Count Paganello and Captain Splandiano.[1]

In addition to these punishments, eight men were condemned to the galleys, one of them having been a servant of Splandiano; ten were dismissed (the page Luigi, for example, to whom Lodovico refers in his letter); and four were sent to prison. Of these four, the most interesting is Filelfo. He was sentenced to fifteen years of the strictest imprisonment, and that may have meant the darkness of a sixteenth-century dungeon; but the sentence was intended to be less condemnatory than one of death, and we may therefore suppose that Filelfo was at least not a violent man.

[1] We learn these details by good luck, for they were sent by a gentleman to an abbot on January the 4th of the next year, 1586.

CHAPTER XXII

The End Of The Story

WHEN the swift-moving and massive hand of Venice had thus avenged the murder of Vittoria and her harmless brother, the story had come almost to an end; but it may be of interest to find out what happened to Marcello, to the Greek sorceress, to Sixtus himself, to Paolo Giordano's young heir, encircled in tragedy, and even, perhaps, to the House of Accoramboni. These ends we will tie up and, having done so, examine the relationship of the facts, now in the reader's imagination, with the queer version of them which, a generation afterwards, John Webster presented to London theatre-goers in the time of James the First.

The poetasters of Italy found an irresistible theme in the death of Italy's most beautiful woman at the age of twenty-eight. "There is no lack", says Brigante Colonna, "of Latin and Italian verses, collected in a large anonymous manuscript volume. We can read them, but alas! without any pleasure. We find in them Euterpe, Urania and Clio: and, needless to say, Love himself whom the death of Vittoria has shorn of wings, rays, bow and quiver. We find innumerable

Bears and Lions, emblematic of the Orsini, of Sixtus and of Venice: but we shall not find any art." The Paduans produced a Latin epitaph which runs: "To Vittoria Coramboni Orsini: a lady of virtue and of incomparable beauty: who, after the death of the Illustrious Lord Paolo Giordano Orsini, betook herself to Padua because, having been his victor, she would not be vanquished by any other: nor was she vanquished but rather fell betrayed by another ferocious Orsino (Bear): to her the Paduans, with many tears, set up this stone."

An epitaph composed in Rome is not so complimentary and is further from the truth.[1] In contracted Latin it says, in effect: "To Venus and Cupid: to Victoria, a woman before all other beauties the most beautiful, who by a bite of a pear[2] triumphed over a hungry Bear; who for the death of a Bear was torn to pieces by a Bear: to her, Flora and her successful rival Phryne, with her company of harlots, have set up this Empty Tomb."

The Bishop of Fossombrone (Ottavio Accoramboni),

[1] 'Veneri Cupidinique. Victoriae, foeminae ante caeteras omnes: pulchritudines pulcherrimae: Piri morsu de famelico Urso triumphatrici: Ursi morte ab Urso dilaniatae: Flora et Phryne: convocatis lupanaribus: imitatrici: Caenotaphium."

I owe the above translation to my friend, Commander C. B. Fry.

[2] "Pear" is a pun on the name of Vittoria's husband, Peretti. The festivals of Flora were wildly sexual. Phryne, of course, is the famous Greek courtesan.

preaching a sermon on January the 10th, 1586, referred to Vittoria and Flaminio in the following words: "Lord of our lives and of our destinies, Thou who breathedst so fair a spirit into these two angels, teach us still to bear patiently every sad event, and awaken in our hearts a love of our enemies, to the end that on earth all persons in the world may have peace and, in heaven, may, with Vittoria and Flaminio, participate for ever in celestial glory." As for the Pope, it is difficult to make out what emotion passed through him when he heard of Vittoria's death. Mutinelli, a contemporary, says that "he was much perturbed, and with pitying gestures his Holiness manifested how grieved he was, inasmuch that he had already forgiven her for any part which she might have had in the death of his nephew, and because he had left the avenging of it in the hands of God". We know at least that, accompanied by his court, he visited "the seven churches" within two days of hearing about her death: and he did so, in the belief of the common people, in order to pray for Vittoria's soul. The *Rome News*, however (January 1, 1586), suggests, with its usual impudence, that he was giving thanks for her death. Seeing that he had sent money to her at a time when he might without censure have ignored her altogether, the common people were probably nearer the truth than the intellectuals. When he heard about the execution of

Lodovico, he told the Venetian Ambassador to convey his congratulations to the Republic, adding: "The Republic has served God well by not countenancing these ruffians, and it is God's custom to send legions of angels to assist good Princes."

Nevertheless, the old man was tenacious in his determination to hunt down the persons who, still alive, had really some connection with the murder of Peretti: and of these, the principal was, of course, Marcello Accoramboni. The others were three or four of Paolo Giordano's hired assassins. Here, however, Sixtus found himself in a cleft stick. He wanted to make an end of Marcello; but he realized that private vengeance does not become the occupant of Saint Peter's throne.

Marcello had been hiding in a monastery, either at Venice or at Padua, and since he was therefore upon Venetian territory, it was necessary that the Republic should extradite him: but the Republic, desiring to maintain its reputation as an asylum for those who fled from less fortunate States, refused to give him up. The Pope had not personally approached the Republic. He had ordered the Governor of Rome to secure the person of Marcello, and he had stipulated that there was to be no mention of Peretti. Marcello, in fact, was to be apprehended, if possible, for the murder of Moricone.

Meanwhile, Marcello, bored (as we should expect)

by his monastic life, and calculating that in the prevalent mood of the Paduans he, as a brother of Vittoria and Flaminio, would receive a large measure of pleasant publicity, ventured forth and appeared once more in the streets of the city. Even the Paduans, however, were powerless to send him to Rome unless they had the authority of Venice to do so. They took their stand upon the fact that Marcello's two most notorious murders—of Peretti and Moricone—had not been perpetrated within their jurisdiction, and that in consequence they were not called upon to recognize that he had committed these crimes. They felt no such tenderness for the obscure Greek sorceress, whom, indeed, they were eager to capture: "a woman regarded in Padua", said the local bishop, "as a witch, who for many years was employed by the Lady Accorambona, and is believed to have enchanted Lord Paolo Giordano, and to have practised divers other sorceries".

Marcello, finding that his position had become precarious, ridiculously declared in a letter to the Venetian authorities that he had murdered Moricone simply because Moricone had murdered Peretti. Nobody, of course, believed him, although there may be truth in the latter part of his statement. The Paduans had apparently been so much horrified by the fate of Vittoria that they were inclined to make everything as easy as possible for Marcello; but Venice, knowing

well that many of their visitors really came from the Pope himself, decided in the end that she must do something to placate him. Marcello was arrested and thrown into prison at Venice.

Sixtus, perhaps goaded by the implacable Camilla, became more and more furiously intent upon seeing that Marcello should not continue to live, and yet he was equally determined that the killing of Marcello must seem to have no connection with the killing of Peretti, five years earlier. At last, towards the end of April, the Venetian Council of Ten discovered a means of satisfying his blood-lust and of saving his face. The Venetian Ambassador in Rome was instructed to say that Venice was dispatching a group of prisoners (including many brigands) to Ancona, and that anyone who cared to do so would find that Marcello Accoramboni and the Greek sorceress were among the passengers on that particular ship.

When the ship came in at Ancona, which was under Papal jurisdiction, the prisoners were at once prepared for transport to Rome. It has been said that the sorceress threw herself overboard and was drowned, but other chroniclers report that she was shot. Marcello was tried for the murder, not of Peretti and not even of Moricone, but of Pallavicino—whom most people had quite forgotten: and it was in this way that the Pope managed to satisfy Camilla without sullying his reputa-

tion. Marcello, surrounded from all sides and knowing well that he had run his course, became seriously ill; but Sixtus had no intention of allowing him to die unpunished. Evil had always to be punished, for a murderer would learn nothing if he died a natural death, and accordingly the Pope sent an order to the Governor of Ancona, commanding him to behead Marcello without delay.

The *Rome News* tells us that Marcello was beheaded in prison and that his body was afterwards exhibited to the public. The *News* adds that he died "bravely, as a good Catholic", calling upon the Pope to absolve him from the murders of Moricone and Pallavicino, "but not of another murder, as many people might suppose".

Two years later—in June, 1588—the decaying body of Vittoria's first husband was transferred with great pomp, and in the presence of an immense multitude, from the little church where it had been deposited when it was still inglorious to the Pope's favourite church, Santa Maria Maggiore. And meanwhile, Giulia Savelli, the young widow of Lodovico, had availed herself of Lodovico's remarkable suggestion that she ought to marry again, and had espoused, in November, 1587, a Spanish nobleman. Ottavio, Vittoria's second brother, who had referred to her in his sermon, narrowly lost the honour of receiving a Cardinal's hat, but did at least

live to be eighty-five, and died in 1635, when the world had altered in a thousand ways. Old Claudio, father of Vittoria, of Flaminio and of Marcello, outlived his famous daughter by four years: but their mother, the redoubtable Tarquinia, continued to exist, as we might suppose that she would, until she was seventy-nine. She died in 1595 at Fossombrone, and it is surprising that she did not see at least the dawn of the seventeenth century.

Last of all, Virginio—the son of Paolo Giordano and of Isabella de' Medici—strangely enough married Flavia Damasceni Peretti, a grand-niece of the Pope; and when they celebrated their nuptials, as Duke and Duchess of Bracciano, these two young persons must have experienced many unusual emotions. Sixtus himself became somewhat sick in the spring of 1590 and, "taking too much wine, as the Italian peasants tend to do on such occasions",—that is how Pastor puts it,—died on May the 27th. Only a few days earlier the vital old man had received a deputation from Poland.

The honourable line of the Accoramboni continued, through the Abbot Mario, to thrust out little leaves of life until 1691; and to the very last this family strove, in vain, to secure a part of the Bracciano estate.

CHAPTER XXIII

*W*ebster's *P*lay

TWO anonymous chroniclers, writing independently, recorded the fate of Vittoria within a year of her death. Their work remained in manuscript for some two hundred and fifty years, and, even then, was first printed in a German translation. We next hear of the story from Stendhal, who affirms that, while looking for old Italian pictures at a price which he could afford, he came across an ancient manuscript—"grave, direct, supremely obscure"—and written, he says, "twelve days after the death of the heroine".[1] Stendhal, who was writing a generation before the industrious Domenico Gnoli, speaks of "Sonnets full of grace and feeling, and other pieces of poetry, the work of Vittoria Accoramboni. . . . It appears that her intelligence was equal to her beauty and her charm." There can be no doubt that Stendhal had found an accurate version of the story, for in his relation of it he includes all the principal events.

Now, Vittoria was murdered in 1585, and in 1610—

[1] *The Abbess of Castro and Other Tales*, translated by C. K. Scott Moncrieff.

for that is the date considered to be the most likely by Mr F. L. Lucas—John Webster, in London, wrote his play about her, *The White Divel*. How, we must wonder, did he get hold of the story? Mr Lucas, in his erudite and superb edition of Webster's Works,—and from this fine scholar I must borrow largely,—informs us that in 1601 Virginio Orsini, son of Paolo Giordano, came as a Florentine Ambassador to visit Queen Elizabeth. At this time Webster would have been about twenty years of age; and since we know from his own admission that people taunted him about his slowness in writing a play, we may assume that he was a man who would nurse a project for years. It is probable, therefore, that Webster heard the story from some gentleman in the entourage of Virginio Orsini, or perhaps at second or third hand. We can be certain that he got it from hearsay and not from a written version, because of his extraordinary mistakes.

In *The White Divel*, which was published in 1612, he refers to Vittoria as "the famous Venetian Curtizan", evidently confusing her with Bianco Capello, for the latter, though not really a "curtizan", was at least a Venetian. Again, Webster turns the harmless, lute-playing Flaminio into a rogue and pander, while the infamous Marcello becomes the good brother. Rupert Brooke suggested that Webster transposed the names because "Marcello" has a noble sound and "Flaminio",

by association with "flame", carries a sinister overtone; but not everybody will agree with him, and it is much more likely that Webster misremembered the names of Vittoria's brothers. In "Zanche, a Moor" we have certainly a muddled reminiscence of the Greek sorceress. Francesco Peretti has been changed into "Camillo". Virginio may have been altered into Giovanni, as Mr Lucas proposes, because he was still alive when the play was first presented, although we may doubt whether a Jacobean dramatist would have shown so much delicacy toward a foreign nobleman. Strangest of all among Webster's errors or alterations is the transformation of Cardinal Montalto into "Monticelso, a Cardinal: Afterwards, Pope Paul the Fourth". As the reader knows well, Montalto became Sixtus the Fifth, and had been dead for only a dozen years when the public went to see Webster's play. To name the Pope wrongly was to anticipate the historical experts in Hollywood.

Mr Lucas opens his "General Introduction" by showing us how variously critics have assessed the worth of Webster as a playwright. Swinburne was, of course, enthusiastic in his praise. Bernard Shaw calls Webster a "Tussaud laureate"—one of those half-truths which, by their very aptness, can almost snuff out a big reputation. It is comparable with Debussy's remark that the Wagnerian *leit-motif* suggests that a character presents

his visiting-card whenever he comes on to the stage. William Archer speaks of "ramshackle looseness of structure and barbarous violence of effect . . . hideous cacophonies, neither verse nor prose . . . Bedlam-broke-loose . . . poor Webster". On the other side, Cambridge undergraduates, in the early nineteen-twenties, apparently decided that Webster was our supreme dramatist: an exaggeration which to me became intelligible when a young musician announced that he preferred Mozart to Beethoven and Puccini to Wagner "because I am not comfortable with the very big genius". May we not suspect that a war-tried generation will always recoil from deep emotion?

What, then, should we think of Webster as a dramatist, and as a poet? It was in 1920 that a few enthusiasts founded The Phoenix, a Sunday-play society. They began with Webster's most famous play, *The Duchess of Malfi*, and for seven years they continued to let the small London public of intelligent playgoers hear the magnificent English of the Elizabethan and Restoration playwrights. *The White Devil* was presented, by a rival association, at the Scala Theatre in 1925. It was again presented, at the St Martin's Theatre, on March the 17th, 1935. Mr Allan Wade, who had produced nearly all the Phoenix revivals, and the writer of this book were vainly attempting to rekindle a delight in old English plays;

but the world had moved onwards and had evidently no longer any taste for the masterpieces or near-masterpieces of other days. It is therefore probable that no one will see *The White Devil* for perhaps another fifty years. The cast was as follows:

Lodovico	Reginald Jarman
Antonelli	Algernon Mills
Gasparo	Ben Soutten
The Duke of Brachiano	Wilfrid Walter
Vittoria Corombona	Oriel Ross
Flamineo	John Laurie
Camillo	Harold Scott
Zanche	Dorothy Dunkels
Cornelia (mother of Vittoria)	Barbara Everest
Francisco dei Medicis	Philip Desborough
Cardinal Monticelso	John Oxford
Isabella (wife of Brachiano)	Iris Baker
Marcello	Hubert Langley
Giovanni	Desmond Tester
A Conjurer	Algernon Mills
A Lawyer	Richard Goolden
The English Ambassador	A. Corney Grain
The French Ambassador	Algernon Hicks
The Matron of a House of Convertites	Marjorie Gabain
Hortensio	Anthony Francis

A Young Lord . . .	Peter Copley
An Armourer . . .	Algernon Hicks
A Physician	Mario Francelli
Christophero . . .	Adrian Thomas

Mr Lucas tells us that we must not look for architectural unity in the Elizabethan drama.[1] He says that the dramatist thought only in scenes, and that the audience was well satisfied if it watched a series of them, provided that the scenes were effective. This may be so; and certainly I have read somewhere that a Restoration audience used to walk in and out of the theatre. They probably did not behave like this when the play was new; for we must remember that all seventeenth-century theatres were repertory theatres, frequently reviving their successes, and that the auditors, in consequence, might with some justification return to their places in order to watch a particular scene. I do not think we can dispute the suggestion that the Elizabethan dramatist worked from point to point, using a "ramshackle" technique which has some resemblance to that of the films; and this, no doubt, is why Henslowe could employ half a dozen young men to prepare a play at top speed: but it is one thing, and a negligible slip, for a dramatist to make his hero, soon after having seen a ghost, speak of death as a bourne from which no traveller

[1] Custom hallows the word. Most of our Elizabethan dramatists might more accurately be called Jacobeans.

returns, and quite another thing (and a cardinal flaw) if he does not make his characters reasonably consistent. A slow writer is more likely to smudge his character-drawing than one who works quickly; and it is noteworthy that all the best of Shakespeare's plays[1] are dramatic organisms and not tied together in the Heath Robinson manner of most among his contemporaries or disciples. Not even a Frenchman could require more architectural quality in the design of *Othello*.

Let us, then, examine *The White Devil* with some care and try to determine whether Hazlitt and Saintsbury were right when they said that it is Webster's best play, and whether it is or is not a masterpiece.

Act One

Scene I. Lodovico opens the play, most effectively, with the one word "Banished!" Two friends attempt to console him.

Scene II. Vittoria enters with Brachiano. She speaks a line and a half, and then goes out. What did the boy-actor who played the part of Vittoria think of Master Webster's invention? The title of the play suggests that Vittoria will be the central character and that, in consequence, we should expect an elaborate study of

[1] *Othello; Hamlet; Lear; Twelfth Night; As You Like It; A Midsummer Night's Dream; The Tempest;* and perhaps *Macbeth. Antony and Cleopatra* is a clear example of a Heath Robinson composition.

her mind and temperament; but Webster, having presented her to his audience, removes her at once. There can never be any rules in any art, and yet we may almost be sure that a principal character in a play must be given an opportunity—to use a theatre-word—of "establishing" herself when she first appears.

We shall find, however, that Webster was not much interested in his heroine. He has given the play to the arch-villain, Flamineo. This Flamineo is a rattle-tongue, a cousin to Iago, another Elizabethan attempt to digest the doctrines of Machiavelli and to delineate the entirely evil man.

Flamineo, then, begins at once his tremendous rush of racy phrases. He cajoles Vittoria's nincompoop husband (a sort of Aguecheek) into refusing to sleep with her that night; and then inflames Brachiano's passion for her. We are never told why he does so. It may be that he hopes for advancement, and if so, he has unwisely put his faith in a prince; or it may be that he enjoys evil for its own sake. Now, during this scene Brachiano, like Lodovico, starts with an arresting phrase—"Quite lost, Flamineo"; and a little later he says to Vittoria:

> I could wish time would stand still
> And never end this interview, this hour,

to which he adds with most inappropriate sententiousness:

> But all delight doth itself soon'st devour,

the very sentiment which a man, if he were "quite lost" in love, would utterly disbelieve and contemn. Again, Vittoria casually reappears in the middle of the scene, during some verbal fireworks from Flamineo, and, having again spoken a single line, is left by her creator to stand on the stage while her voluble brother continues to prattle.

When at last, in a scene with Brachiano, she has a chance to expand her personality, she spends much of her time (and every minute is precious in the theatre) upon telling him of a dream which she has dreamed. She had sat, the dream says, under a goodly yew tree when the Duchess of Brachiano and Vittoria's young husband began "to challenge" her "about this yew".

> They told me my intent was to root up
> That well-grown yew, and plant i' th' stead of it
> A withered blackthorn, and for that they vowed
> To bury me alive. . . .

We can see well enough that there is a play on the words "yew" and "you"; we apprehend that she is inciting Brachiano to do away with Camillo and the Duchess; but if the yew stands for Brachiano, it is difficult to interpret the blackthorn which is to replace him. Webster did not clearly think out the symbolism of this dream, and his audience was expected to understand it as best they might. According to Elizabethan convention and the use of an apron-stage there is

nothing absurd in the fact that while the lovers are dallying, Cornelia (in the play, Vittoria's mother), Flamineo and Zanche the Moor should watch and overhear them; but Zanche, having appeared, says and does nothing while the others speak some sixty-seven lines. Flamineo, suddenly perceiving her after all this time, exclaims:

What fury raised thee up? Away, away!

and Zanche goes out. No actress would thank Webster for initiating her part in this inexpert manner. And after Cornelia has execrated the lovers, even Vittoria has to leave the stage with nothing better to say than

O me accursed!

Finally, Cornelia has an exit no less feeble, for when she has listened for a long while to her son Flamineo, she must fly from the scene with the mere exclamation:

Misery of miseries!

Let us now consider

Act Two

In Scene One, Cardinal Monticelso and Francesco (the Grand Duke) arrive. Their intention is to support Isabella, Duchess of Brachiano, in her trouble with the Duke; and Isabella is allowed at least one speech of some length before she is told to "be gone". Then

Monticelso and Francesco roundly rebuke Brachiano for his infatuation with Vittoria. The quarrel between the three men is strong and effective. Their personalities become, for the time being, clearly contrasted—the severe Cardinal, the minatory Grand Duke, and the wilful lover standing at bay. The scene is broken by the arrival of Brachiano's little boy, Giovanni, who, like most children in Elizabethan plays, is quite as cute as any American child.[1] This boy unwittingly reconciles Francesco (his uncle) and Brachiano (his father); and, if we have to assume the magical power of consanguinity, we must admit that the scene is remarkably free from sickliness.

It is all the more disconcerting, therefore, to find that no sooner have the two men cordially made up their quarrel than Brachiano, left alone with his wife, informs her that he will have no more amorous connection with her. In itself the scene is well written, but the changes in Brachiano's motivation have already smudged his personality beyond further recognition. When Isabella goes out, a melancholy figure raging against Vittoria, Flamineo introduces a conjurer to his employer. They scheme the murder of Camillo (Vittoria's feeble husband) and of Isabella.

[1] It may not be fanciful to see a likeness of mind in modern America and Elizabethan England. There is a similar blend of ready emotion, intense enthusiasm and practical drive, a blend perhaps characteristic of one stage in a nation's lifetime.

In a subsequent short passage between the allies, Monticelso and Francesco, the former suddenly remarks (as it were, to the audience, though the lines are not an aside from the apron):

> It may be objected I am dishonourable
> To play thus with my kinsman, but I answer,
> For my revenge I'd stake a brother's life,
> That, being wronged, durst not avenge himself.

In the long history of drama there can seldom have been any passage quite so weak and amateurish. We see at once that Webster is thinking, "The audience will not admire him for doing this", and so, completely shedding the skin of his character, he uses the Cardinal to express the author's distrust of his own motivation.

After this, the conjurer produces a "dumb show" in which he reveals how Camillo and Isabella will die. To us this may seem, as a dramatic device, crude and somewhat ridiculous, but the Elizabethans, we must remember, liked these little inset scenes and, for the most part, believed in magic and the power to present prophetic visions.

Act Three

In this act we come upon the scene of the play which is not only regarded in general as its high point but is also the principal cause of its renown: and yet, even here, we must question the dramatic instinct of a play-

wright who achieves his climax in the middle of a play and cannot soar any higher.

After a wrangle between the good and the bad brother of Vittoria, and a "pageant" of foreign Ambassadors (and that would have impressed the groundlings), Vittoria comes for trial before Monticelso, Francesco and the Ambassadors. The charge against her is that she was a party to the murder of Camillo. She is arraigned by a lawyer who is supposed to make a comic effect by using sesquipedalian and unintelligible words. Perhaps he split the sides of the audience in 1612; and if he seems to us a laborious and dismal funny-man, we must bear in mind that the humorists of 1940 may be wearisome in 1980.

To read or to witness this celebrated scene is to echo the comment of the English Ambassador, "She hath a brave spirit". When the Cardinal has girded at her and stated that he is

> resolved
> Were there a second paradise to lose
> This devil would betray it,

Vittoria makes a fine answer with

> O poor Charity!
> Thou art seldom found in scarlet.

A better dramatist would instinctively have refrained from straightway checking the impact between these two by allowing the Cardinal to make a long speech

about whores and "their perfect character"; but to write pithy character-sketches of this or that human type was a fashion of the age; and seeing that it was Webster's custom to work with a commonplace-book at his elbow, he probably wrote this speech (if he did not borrow the substance of it from someone else) before he wrote the play and, coming to his third act, thought the speech too good to be wasted.[1] Vittoria continues throughout the play to show "a brave spirit" as when she cries:

> Let me appeal, then, from this Christian Court
> To the uncivil [2] Tartar,

and again with

> Terrify babes, my lord, with painted devils,
> I am past such needless palsy. . . .

Before long, Brachiano blusteringly breaks in, and having declared that he had merely done his best out of charity for a young widow, threatens the Cardinal and stalks off the stage. Technically it was not worth while to bring him into the scene, since his intervention is so brief and ineffective. He should not have appeared

[1] Shakespeare, whose characters are seldom inconsistent, must similarly have composed the Queen Mab speech without thinking of *Romeo and Juliet*, for it is quite out of tune with the personality of Mercutio—a pronounced he-man.

[2] i.e. uncivilized.

at all, or he should have stayed throughout the scene and have changed its course. It is true that Vittoria subsequently reawakens the necessary tempo with such words as

> Who says so but yourself? If you be my accuser,
> Pray cease to be my judge: come from the bench,
> Give in your evidence 'gainst me, and let these[1]
> Be moderators.

but the tempo has been twice disastrously halted, and it is difficult indeed to give the scene any cumulative force. Vittoria is dispatched to a "house of penitent whores".

The act concludes with an extremely baffling scene. Lodovico has returned from exile, and most surprisingly he proposes to set up house with Flamineo. However, they soon come to blows, and there's an end of it. We are supposed, presumably, to be much interested in Flamineo; but—to us, if not to his contemporaries—he is a minor character, and in consequence his scene with Lodovico is a catastrophic anticlimax after the trial of Vittoria.

Critics have argued with each other concerning the sincerity or the bluff which Vittoria manifests before her judges. The debate has no core. Vittoria does not pretend to be a spotless innocent. She merely hits back at her accusers.

[1] The Ambassadors.

Act Four

The first scene brings Francesco and Monticelso once more together. The Cardinal has brought his "black book", containing the names and the sins of various sinners. The scene adds no momentum to the central subject of the play (which is, or should be, the destiny of Vittoria and Brachiano); and when Webster felt that it had continued for long enough, he removed the Cardinal with the abrupt words:

> I must make bold
> To leave your lordship,

although he has given no reason for having to be elsewhere. There can seldom have been a tamer or more difficult exit.

Francesco then sees the ghost of his sister, the murdered Isabella. When the ghost has gone, he writes a false love-letter to Vittoria. He sends it by a servant, and his purpose is to make Brachiano so jealous that Brachiano will break off the affair with Vittoria.

In the second scene we are within the "house of penitent whores". Flamineo delivers Francesco's letter, but to Brachiano, of course, not to Vittoria. When she duly arrives, she and her lover have a fierce quarrel, but the vigorous scene, once more, is written for Flamineo. He hovers about the conflicting pair and, in the event,

persuades them not to wrangle but rather to flee away together. The scene is exciting; its truth to a lovers' violent tug-of-war is admirable: but then Webster, with his lamentable instinct for depending not upon the flow of inspiration which the situation ought to have generated in his brain but upon the notebook at his elbow, ruins the whole effect by permitting Flamineo to tell another obscure tale, this time about a crocodile. He could not see a climax when he had achieved one. With astounding perversity he continues to destroy his own effects.

The Elizabethans had a taste for pageantry: indeed, we English are thought, by foreigners, to retain that taste and, moreover, to contrive our pageants or processions better than any other people; but to introduce another procession of Ambassadors, just when we want to know what will happen to the hunted lovers, is so suicidal that we must begin to wonder whether this playwright had any sense of the theatre whatsoever. It is becoming more and more obvious that Webster held his scenes together with safety-pins, or with what he judged to be safety-pins; for, having already given his audience two "dumb shows", he now decided to give them another class-thrill by again allowing them to watch "six Ambassadors" in action.

Not quite forgetting his story, he then remembers to make Francesco "whisper" to the new Pope (Monti-

celso) that Brachiano and Vittoria have fled. The act ends with Lodovico, in whom no auditor can have taken much interest, receiving money sent by the new Pope to the end that he shall do away with the two lovers.

We may admit that dramatic rules are made to be broken, broken by a genius who can devise something more effective; but no reader will fail to see how dangerous, if not fatal, was Webster's tendency to give the end of a scene to a subsidiary character.

Act Five

Mr Lucas thinks that "repeatedly his fifth act loses hold. For he wrote slowly; and it seems, in play after play, as if his brain had grown stale before his work was done". Whatever we may decide about this verdict, we are not now likely to agree that "*The White Devil*, well acted, can carry an audience breathless with it over all the breaks and rough places in the plot, with the irresistible onrush of a great roller surging up a rocky beach". Would that it were so; but "the breaks" are too frequent, for every drop in the temperature of a play, unless it is calculated (as in some Elizabethan fourth-acts), means that the audience will begin to remember its private affairs and, having wandered in mind, will be on each occasion more difficult to recapture.

Nevertheless, the last act of *The White Devil*, although its interest is too discontinuous, as we may recognize when we find that it contains six scenes, is plucked, like a precious manuscript from the fire, by some of the most magnificent dramatic lines which even Webster could achieve.

The act is so intricate that we had best consider it scene by scene. Scene One begins with the usual rattling talk from Flamineo, Webster's mistaken favourite. We then learn that four characters have disguised themselves as Moors; and we must not object that the Grand Duke of Tuscany could never possibly have bemeaned himself in such wise. Lodovico is another disguised character. They have come to murder Brachiano.

Presently we have a conversation between Marcello and Flamineo in which the former taunts the latter because Zanche the Moor pursues him. Dramatically, the scene is wholly worthless: another example of disastrously stalling the car. Moreover, in this scene Francesco, perhaps because he is disguised, suddenly adopts the idiom of Flamineo.[1] Webster has, in fact, completely forgotten his original conception of the Grand Duke, and he takes refuge in the smart-stuff of Elizabethan writing.

[1] e.g. "'Tis a ridiculous thing for a man to be his own chronicle—I did never wash my mouth with mine own praise, for fear of getting a stinking breath." This is pure Flamineo, and absurd in the character of Francesco.

The play seems here to fall utterly to pieces. Zanche's part, now that she has at last come back, is not only thin, but so intermittent that no actress could give it any force. There is then another tedious quarrel between the Good and the Bad Brother, a scene which continues to dilute the story which the dramatist was supposed to be telling. And when Zanche suddenly makes Moorish love to Francesco, disguised as "Mulinassar", we are side-tracked for at least the twentieth time. What do we care about Zanche? The play could do without her. What we want to know is how Brachiano and Vittoria are faring; and not even the bright sallies of the inexhaustible Flamineo can prevent us from wondering what has become of the main story.

Well, in Scene Two, Cornelia (Vittoria's mother) reappears. Her sons, Flamineo and Marcello, quarrel again, and Flamineo kills Marcello. Cornelia plays up well.

Then Brachiano enters, accoutred for a tilting-match, "except for his beaver" (vizor). He attempts to gloss over the murder of Marcello, and to make peace between Cornelia and Flamineo: but Cornelia, as we know later, has gone out of her wits! And during this interview Lodovico "sprinkles Brachiano's beaver with a poison". We may suppose that he did so on the apron-stage, in full view of the audience, for the

dialogue continues and an action performed during speeches may easily be unobserved.

In the third scene we find Webster at his most inept. Ought we to be interested in Vittoria? Surely: but what do we find? True, Brachiano and others "tilt at the barriers", and Brachiano finds that his poisoned vizor is aflame, like the Shirt of Nessus: but in what measure has the dramatist sustained Vittoria's part? In three pages of dialogue she has, at first, five words, and then once more another five. Webster has, obviously, no interest in the character from whom he took the title of his play. He continues to be absorbed in the manufacture of wisecracks for Flamineo.

Even when Brachiano is dying, Vittoria is given no more to say than "Oh, my good lord", "O my lord", "Milord hears nothing" and "Oh, lie still, my lord". Is it possible to conceive that the veriest amateur in playwriting could have less instinct for theatrical effect? And as if to show how poor a playwright he was, Webster sends his heroine out "with the rest". He was already intent upon his next scene of horror, and—forgetting that we have been led to be interested in Vittoria—he just pushes her into the wings as though she were a nonentity. Is that a splendid way in which to sustain your leading actress? Do we not begin to see, if we have not already seen, that Webster had no dramatic instinct at all? Or was it that, relying (as

Shakespeare needed to do) upon boys to play the women's parts, he did not share Shakespeare's faith in them? Throughout this play he tends to forget that women's parts ought to be made consistent and interesting. Over and over again he seems to lose faith in the lads who were to play those parts; for Vittoria, Cornelia and Zanche are equally ill-served. Webster obviously conceived that the rattle-tongued Flamineo was his chief attraction: but this error-of-the-age has caused his play to become a mere museum-piece. With his power to find magnificent phrases for tremendous situations, he might have written a true masterpiece if he had forgotten Flamineo and had bent his imagination toward the passion and the miserable fate of the two lovers. Think only of the terrific flame which John Ford turns upon his two lovers in *'Tis pity she's a whore*. . . .

In the fourth scene Flamineo continues to chatter. Then his mother, now quite crazed, distributes rue and rosemary: so transparent a recollection of Ophelia that it is interesting because we can see that Webster never divined that *Hamlet* would become a world-classic. He borrowed from a fellow-dramatist who was still alive, just as Mr Rodney Coward might adopt an effect which Mr Somerset Priestley had first conceived. What could have been more blameless or more effective if only Posterity had not decided to make itself uncom-

monly familiar with the work of the man who first thought of this flower-giving scene? Elizabethan playwrights were continually picking the pockets of one another, nor did any of them object to the practice; but Webster, unwittingly, had stolen some of the Crown Jewels.

The fifth scene, fortunately, is brief. Lodovico beseeches the disguised Francesco to absent himself from the coming murder of Vittoria—subsequently accomplished in a manner very different from the event in real life.

In the sixth and last scene Webster again reveals himself as a man with no sense of the theatre but also as a dramatic poet who can find immemorial words for a mighty occasion. Vittoria is to die: the preliminaries to her death seem, in the twentieth century, somewhat grotesque and as ineffectual as a poor conjuring-trick. Flamineo threatens her, and also Zanche, with a pair of pistols. They ask him to show them how to die. He shoots at himself, and pretends to be dying. The women exult in their escape: whereupon Flamineo rises and explains to them that "the pistols held no bullets".

Suddenly Lodovico and one of his associates appear, disguised as friars. They come to slay Vittoria, but perceive that they will also need to slay Flamineo and Zanche. Throughout this scene Webster oscillates

between magnificent phrases and others of so weak or inapt a kind as almost to ruin the best that he could do. Flamineo, for example, now that death is right up against him, has time to observe:

> Let all that do ill, take this precedent:
> Man may his fate foresee, but not prevent.
> And of all axioms this shall win the prize,
> 'Tis better to be fortunate than wise,

couplets which may well have been extracted from the author's notebook. It is, nevertheless, in this scene that Vittoria, when the assassins wish to "Kill the Moor first", utters those immortal lines, worthy of Cleopatra:

> You shall not kill her first. Behold my breast.
> I will be waited on in death; my servant
> Shall never go before me . . .
> Yes, I shall welcome death
> As princes do some great Ambassadors;
> I'll meet thy weapon half-way;

and, almost with her last breath,

> My soul, like to a ship in a black storm,
> Is driven I know not whither.

This superb phrase is, however, immediately occulted by some rattling rhymes from Flamineo which show for the hundredth time how wavering was the genius of Webster: and, moreover, we see by the fact that Flamineo, garrulous to the end, is reserved to die after the death of his sister, that he and not she was, in Webster's mind, the centre of interest in this play.

The boy Giovanni, accompanied by the Ambassadors, brings the drama to a quiet conclusion.

* * *

Webster has been praised for the lurid and thunderous atmosphere of his two best works, and it is indeed as though the actors in them moved against a huge and blood-red curtain. He has also been admired for the strength of those grim and churchyard metaphors which came so readily to his peculiar imagination. He has been censured for his "ramshackle" dramatic construction; and, more often, for the schoolboyishness of the horrors with which he tries to make our flesh creep. Mr Lucas warns us not to regard him "as a sort of inspired sexton", and considers that we should estimate him "not indeed as a bad dramatist, but as a narrow one, who saw life passionately and intensely, but who did not see it whole". The same high authority challenges dispute, however, when he suggests that Vittoria (in the play) is "more magnificent than Lady Macbeth, nobler than Cleopatra".

Even the foregoing outline of *The White Devil* may be sufficient to show the reader that the play is so wretchedly built that "ramshackle" was certainly the right word; that Webster could not hold his characters firmly in his imagination; and that over and over again he ruins a fine passage by following it with

a poor one. Rupert Brooke in his brilliant essay puts the matter exceedingly well when he says: "He emerged with so little facility in writing, and so little aptitude for a good plot (in the ordinary sense), that one must conclude that his genius was not best fitted for theatrical expression, into which it was driven": and again: "His literary skill, his amazing genius for incorporating fragments of his experience, his 'bitter flashes' and slow brooding atmosphere of gloom, would have been more tremendous untrammelled by dramatic needs".

We are unfair if we decry him for the chamber-of-horrors element in his work—and it is present much more in *The Duchess of Malfi* than in his other plays; for, as Lucas points out, and as old tombstones reveal, our ancestors were much more concerned than we are with the appurtenances of the sexton and the physical aspect of death. Nevertheless, we may reasonably maintain that he was not a natural dramatist, that he thought in lines rather than in terms of character, that his notebook was a fatal resource when inspiration drooped, and that even his best work is always an ill-conceived crazy quilt into which he injudiciously sewed pieces of cloth, of silk, of velvet and even of leather. The gravest defects of *The White Devil* are three: its tendency to stall, its frequent use of weak passages after noble ones, and Webster's extraordinary notion that

his villain, Flamineo, was the character in whom an audience would find most interest. Vittoria's part is at times, as we have seen, so poorly sustained that after two rehearsals any actress would wonder what she could do to make it seem well conceived and continuous. The Elizabethans appear not to have greatly trusted their boy-actors, for the reader would be surprised if he were to number the lines accorded even by Shakespeare to his heroines. Those parts, however, are so clearly imagined and, as a rule, so skilfully contrived that they seem to be longer than they are: and, after all, it was natural for a playwright of the period to rely more upon the skill of a mature actor than upon that of a boy.

Nevertheless, though the world may finally agree that Webster was a bad, and a very bad, dramatist, it will never deny that he was sometimes a great tragic poet.

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